

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1847, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

DEDICATION.

To Mrs. Zadock Pratt, of Prattsville, New York, the following pages are dedicated with the deepest feeling of respect for her own virtues as a lady, and for the name she bears—a name that will long be associated with the generous and successful effort to advance the interests of the working classes, and promote the dignity of labor. ANN S. STEPHENS.

CHAP. I.—THE FRUIT GIRL.

"Kind sir, pray take these roses,
They're an emblem of my youth;
But never, like these posies,
Shall perish Julia's truth!"

THE morning had not fully dawned on New York, yet its approach was visible everywhere amid the fine scenery around the city. The dim shadows piled above Weehawken were warming up with purple, streaked here and there with threads of rosy gold. The waters of the Hudson heaved and rippled to the glow of yellow and crimson light, that came and went in flashes on each idle curl of the waves. Long Island lay in the near distance like a thick, purplish cloud, through which the dim outline of house, tree, mast, and spire loomed mistily like half-formed objects on a camera obscura.

Silence, that strange, dead silence that broods over a scene crowded with slumbering life, lay upon the city, broken only by the rumble of vegetable carts, and the jar of milk-cans as they rolled up from the different ferries; or the half-smothered roar of some steamboat putting into its dock, freighted with sleeping passengers.

After a little, symptoms of aroused life became visible about the wharves. Grocers, carmen, and huckster women began to swarm around the provision boats. The markets, nearest the water were opened, and soon become theatres of active bustle.

The first market opened that day was in Fulton street. As the morning deepened, piles of vegetables, loads of beef, hampers of fruit, heaps of luscious butter, cages of poultry, canary birds swarming in their weary prisons, forests of green-house plants, horse-radish grinders with their reeking machines, venders of hot coffee, root beer and doughnuts, all with men, women and children swarming in, over and among them like so many ants hard at work, filled the spacious arena, but late a range of silent, naked and gloomy looking stalls. Next, carts, laden and groaning beneath a weight of food, came rolling up to this great mart, crowding each avenue with

fresh supplies—now all was life and eagerness. Stout men and bright faced women moved through the verdant chaos, arranging, working, chatting, and full of life and enterprise, while the rattling of carts outside, and the gradual accumulation of sounds everywhere, bespoke a great city aroused like a giant refreshed by slumber.

Slowly there arose out of this cheerful confusion forms of homely beauty, that an artist or a thinking man might have loved to look upon. The butchers stalls, but late a desolate range of gloomy beams, now reddening with fresh joints, and many of them festooned with fragrant branches and gorgeous garden flowers, and the butchers standing, each by his stall, with snow white apron, and an eager, joyous look of traffic on his face, formed a display of comfort and plenty, both picturesque and pleasant to contemplate.

The fruit and vegetable stands were now loaded with damp, green vegetables, each humble root having its own peculiar tint, and often arranged with a singular taste for color, unconsciously possessed by the woman who exercised her little skill in setting off her stand to advantage.

There was one vegetable stand to which we would draw the reader's particular attention, not exactly as a type of the others, for there was something so unlike all the rest, both in this stand and its occupant, that it would have drawn the attention of any person possessed of the slightest artistical taste. It was like the arrangement of a picture, that long table heaped with fruit, the freshest vegetables, and the brightest flowers, ready for the day's traffic. The rich scarlet radishes glowing up through their foliage of tender green; young onions swelling out from their long emerald stalks, snowy and transparent almost as so many great pearls; turnips, scarcely larger than a hen's egg, and almost as white, just taken fresh and fragrant from the soil; heads of lettuce in a rich heap of crisp and greenish gold, piled against the deep blackish green of spinach and water-cresses, all moist with dew or wet with bright water-drops that had supplied its place, and taking a deeper tint from the golden contrast. These with the red glow of strawberries in their luscious prime, piled together in masses, and shaded with dry grape leaves; bouquets of roses, hyacinths, violets, and other fragrant blossoms, that sent their perfume and the glow of their rich colors to the coarser children of the soil, would have made an object pleasant to look upon, independent of the fine old woman who sat complacently on her little stool, at one end of the table, in tranquil expectation of customers that were sure to drop in as the morning deepened.

And now the traffic of the day commenced in earnest. Servants, housekeepers and grocers swarmed into the market. The clink of money; the sound of sharp, eager banter; the dull noise of the butcher's cleaver were heard on every hand. It was a cheerful scene, for every face looked smiling and happy. The soft morning air seemed to have brightened all things into cheerfulness. Among the earliest group that entered Fulton market that morning was a little girl, perhaps ten or eleven years old, but tiny in her form, and appearing even more juvenile than that. A pretty quilted hood of rose colored calico was turned back from her face, which seemed naturally delicate and pale, but the fresh air, and perhaps a shadowy reflection from her hood, gave the glow of a rose-bud to her cheeks. Still there was anxiety upon her young face. Her eyes of a dark violet blue, drooped heavily beneath their black and curling lashes, if any one from the numerous stalls addressed her; for a small splint basket on her arm, new and perfectly empty, was a sure indication that the child had been sent to make purchases; while her timid air, the blush that came and went in her face, bespoke as plainly that she was altogether unaccustomed to the scene, and had no regular place at which to make her humble bargains. The child seemed a stray waif cast upon the market, and she was so beautiful notwithstanding her humble dress of faded and darned calico, that at almost every stand she was challenged pleasantly to pause and fill her basket. But she only cast down her eyes and blushed more deeply, as with her little bare feet she hurried on through the labyrinth of stalls toward that portion of the market occupied by the huckster women. Here she began to slacken her pace and look about her with no inconsiderable anxiety.

"What do you want, little girl; anything in my way?" was repeated to her once or twice as she moved forward. At each of these challenges she would pause, look earnestly into the face of the speaker, and then pass on with a faint wave of the head, that expressed something of sad and timid disappointment.

At length the child was growing pale, and her eyes turned with a sort of sharp anxiety from one face to another, when suddenly they fell upon the buxom old huckster woman, whose stall we have described. There was something in the good dame's appearance that brought an eager and satisfied look to the child. She drew close to the stand, and stood for some seconds gazing timidly on the old woman. It was a pleasant face, and a comfortable, portly form enough that the little girl gazed upon. Smooth and comely were the full and rounded cheeks, with their rich autumn color dimpled like an over-ripe apple. Fat and good-humored enough to defy wrinkles, the face looked far too rosy for the thick, grey hair that was shaded, not concealed, by a cap of snow white muslin, with a broad, deep border, and tabs that met like a snowy girth to support the firm, double chin. Never did your eyes dwell upon a chin so full of health and good humor as that. It sloped with a slick, smiling grace down from the plump mouth, and rolled in a soft, white wave into the neck, scarcely leaving an outline, or the wont of one before it was lost in the

waves of that muslin kerchief, folded so neatly beneath the ample bosom of her gown. Then the broad linen apron of blue and white check, girding her waist, and flowing over the smooth rotundity of a person that was a living proof of the ripeness and wholesome state of her merchandize. I tell you, reader, that woman, take her for all in all, was one to draw the attention, aye, and the love of a child, who had come forth barefooted and alone in search of kindness.

At length the huckster woman saw the child gazing upon her with a look so earnest that she was quite startled by it. She also caught a glance at the empty basket, and her little brown eyes twinkled at the promise of a new customer.

"Well, my dear, what do you want this morning?" she said, smoothing her apron with a pair of plump, little hands, and casting a well satisfied look over her stand, and then at the child, who grew pale at her notice, and began to tremble visibly—"all sorts of vegetables, you see—flowers—strawberries—radishes—what will you have, child?"

The little girl crept round to where the woman stood, and speaking in a low, frightened voice, said—"Please, ma'm, I want you to trust me!"

"Trust you!" said the woman, with a soft laugh, that shook her double chin, and dimpled her cheeks. "Why I don't know you, little one—what on earth do you want trust for? Lost the market money, hey, and afraid of a scolding—is that it?"

"No, no, I haven't lost any money," said the child, eagerly; "please, ma'm, just stoop down one minute, while I tell you!"

The little girl in her earnest way took hold of the woman's apron, and she, kind soul, sunk back to her stool: it was the most comfortable way of listening.

"I—I live with grandfather and grandmother, ma'm; they are old, and poor—you don't know how poor; for he, grandpa, has been sick, and, it seems strange, but I eat as much as any of them. Well, ma'm, I tried to get something to do, but you see how little I am; nobody will think me strong enough even to tend baby; so we have all been without anything to eat since day before yesterday."

"Poor thing!" muttered the huckster woman, "poor thing!"

"Well, ma'm, I must do something. I can bear anything better than seeing them hungry. Last night I did not sleep a wink all night, but kept thinking what I should do. I never begged in my life; they never did, and it made me feel sick to think of it; but I could have done it rather than see them sit and look at each other so pitiful another day. Did you ever see an old man cry for hunger, ma'm?"

"No, no, God forbid!" answered the dame, brushing a plump hand across her eyes.

"I have," said the child, with a sob, "and it was this that made me think that begging, after all, was not so very, very mean. So, this morning, I asked them to let me go out; but grandpa said he might go himself, if he were strong enough; but I never should—never—never!"

"Nice old man—nice old man!" said the huckster woman.

"I did not ask again," resumed the child, "for an idea had come into my head in the night. I have seen little girls, no older than I am, selling radishes and strawberries, and things."

"Yes—yes, I understand!" said the old woman, and her eyes began to twinkle the more brightly that they were wet before.

"But I had no strawberries to sell, nor a cent of money to buy them with!"

"Well! well!"

"Not even a basket!"

"Poor thing!"

"But I was determined to do something. So I went to a grocery where grandpa used to buy things when he had money, and they trusted me with this basket."

"That was very kind in them!"

"Wasn't it very kind?" said the child, her eyes brightening, "especially as I told them it was all myself—that grandpa knew nothing about it. See what a nice, new basket it is—you can't think how much courage it gave me. When I came into the market it seemed as if I shouldn't be afraid to ask any lady about trusting me a little."

"And yet you come clear to this side without stopping to ask any lady!"

"I was looking in their faces to see if it would do," answered the child, with meek simplicity, "but there was something in every face that sent the words back into my throat again."

"So you stopped here because it was almost the last stand."

"No, no, I did not think of that," said the child, eagerly. "I stopped because something seemed to tell me that this was the place. I thought if you would not trust me, you would at least be patient and listen."

The old huckster woman laughed—a low, soft laugh—and the little girl began to smile through her tears. There was something mellow and comfortable in that chuckle, that warmed her to the heart.

"So you were sure that I would trust you—hey, quite sure?"

"I thought if you wouldn't, there was no chance for me anywhere else," replied the child, lifting her soft eyes to the face of the matron.

Again the old woman laughed.

"Well, well, let us see how many strawberries will set you up in business for the day. Six, ten, a dozen baskets—your little arm will tire with more than that. I will let you have them at cost, only be sure to come back at night with the money: I would not for fifty dollars have you fail."

"But I may not sell them all!" said the child, anxiously.

"I should not wonder, poor thing. That sweet voice of yours will hardly make itself heard at first; but never mind, run down into the areas and look through the window—people can't help but look at your face, God bless it!"

As the good woman spoke, she was busy selecting the best and most tempting strawberries from the pile of little baskets that stood at her elbow. These she arranged in the orphan's basket, first sprinkling a layer of damp, fresh grass in the bottom, and interspersing

the whole with young grape leaves, intended both as an embellishment, and to keep the fruit fresh and cool. When all was arranged to her satisfaction, she laid a bouquet of white and crimson moss rose-buds at each end of the basket, and interspersed little tufts of violets along the side, till the crimson berries were wreathed in with flowers.

"There," said the old woman, lifting up the basket with a sigh of satisfaction, "between the fruit and flowers you must make out. Sell the berries for sixpence a basket, and the roses for all you can get. People who love flowers well enough to buy them, never cavil about the price; just let them pay what they like."

The little girl took the basket on her arm; her pretty mouth grew tremulous and bright as the moss rose-bud that trembled against her hand; her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, ma'm, I want to thank you so much, only I don't know how," she said, in a voice that went to the good woman's heart.

"There, there!—never mind—be punctual, that's a good girl. Now, my dear, what is your name?"

"Julia—Julia Warren, ma'm!"

"A pretty name—very well—but stop, stop a moment, I had forgotten."

The child sat her basket down upon the stool which the huckster woman hastily vacated, and waited patiently while the good dame disappeared in some unknown region of the market, eager to accomplish an object that had just presented itself to her mind.

"Here," she said, coming back with her face all in a glow, a small, tin pail in one hand, and her apron gathered up in the other. "Just leave the strawberries, and run home with these. It will be a long time for the old folks to wait, and you will go about the day's work with a lighter heart when you know that they have had a breakfast, to say nothing of yourself, poor thing! There, run along, and be back in no time."

Julia took the little tin pail and the rolls that her kind friend hastily twisted up in a sheet of brown paper.

"Oh! they will be so glad," broke from her, and with a sob of joy she sprang away with her precious burden.

"Well now, Mrs. Gray, you are a strange creature, trusting people like that, and absolutely laying out money too; I only wonder you have ever got along at all!" said a little, shrewish woman from a neighboring stand, who had been watching this scene from behind a heap of vegetables.

"Poh! its my way: and I can afford it," answered the huckster woman, rubbing her plump palms together, and twinkling her eyelashes to disperse the moisture that had gathered under them. "I havn't sat in this market fourteen years for nothing. The child is a good child, I'll stake my life on it!"

"I hope you may never see the pail again, that's all," was the terse reply.

"Well, well, I may be wrong—perhaps I am—we shall know soon. At any rate, I can afford to lose half a dozen pails, that is one comfort."

"Always chuckling over the money she has saved

up," muttered the little woman, with a sneer, "for my part I don't believe that she is half as well off as she pretends."

The conversation was here cut short by several customers, who crowded up to make their morning purchases. During the next half hour good Mrs. Gray was so fully occupied that she had no opportunity for thought of her protegee; but just as she obtained a moment's breathing time, up came the little girl panting for breath; her cheeks glowing like June roses; and her eyes sparkling with delight.

"They have had their breakfast; I told them all about it!" she said, in a panting whisper, drawing close up to the huckster woman, and handing back the empty pail. "I wish you could have seen grandpa when I took off the cover, and let the hot coffee steam into the room. I only wish you could have seen him!"

"And he liked it, did he?"

"Liked it! Oh! if you had been there to see!" The child's eyes were brim full of tears, and yet they sparkled like diamonds.

Mrs. Gray looked over her stall to see if there was anything else that could be added to the basket. That pretty, grateful look expanded her warm heart so pleasantly that she felt quite like heaping everything at hand upon the little girl. But the basket was already quite heavy enough for that slender arm, and the addition of a single handful of fruit or tuft of flowers would have destroyed the symmetry of its arrangement. So with a sigh, half of disappointment, half of that exquisite satisfaction that follows a kind act, she patted little Julia on the head, lifted the basket from the stool, and kindly bade her begone to her day's work.

The child departed with a light tread and a lighter heart, smiling upon every one she met, and looking back as if she longed to point out her benefactress to the whole world.

Mrs. Gray followed her with moist and sunny eyes; then shaking the empty pail at her cynical neighbor in the good-humored triumph of her benevolence, she carried it back to the coffee stand whence it had been borrowed.

"Strawberries!—strawberries!"

Little Julia Warren turned pale, and looked around like a frightened bird when this sweet cry first broke from her lips in the open street. Nobody seemed to hear her, that was one comfort, so she hurried round a corner and creeping into the shadow of a house, leaned, all in a tremor, against an iron railing, quite confident, for the moment, that she should never find courage to open her mouth again. But a little reflection gave her strength. Mrs. Gray had told her that the morning was her harvest hour. She could not stand there trembling beneath the weight of her basket. The fruity scent—the fragrant breath of the violets that floated up from it seemed to reproach her.

"Strawberries!—strawberries!" The sound rose from those red lips more cheerily now: there was ripeness in the very tones that put you in mind of the fruit itself. The cry was neither loud nor shrill, but somehow people were struck by it, and turned unconsciously to look upon the child. This gave her

fresh courage, for the glances were all kind, and as she became accustomed to her own voice, the novelty of her position began to lose its terror. A woman called to her from the area of a house, and purchased two baskets of the strawberries, without asking any reduction in the price. Poor child, how her heart leaped when the shilling was placed in her hand. How important the whole transaction seemed to her, yet with what indifference the woman paid for her strawberries and turned to carry them into the basement.

Julia looked through the railings and thanked this important customer, she could not help it, her little heart was full. A muttered reply that she was "welcome" came back, that was all. Notwithstanding the gruff answer, Julia took up her basket with a radiant face.

"Strawberries—strawberries!" Now the words came forth from red and smiling lips—nay, once or twice the little girl broke into a laugh as she went along, for the bright shilling lay in the bottom of her basket. She wandered on unacquainted with the streets, but quite content, for though she found herself down among the warehouses only, and in narrow, crowded streets, the gentlemen who hurried by would now and then turn for a bunch of violets, and she kept on bewildered but happy as a bird.

All at once the strawberry girl found herself among the shipping, and a little terrified by the coarse and barren appearance of the wharves, she paused close by the water irresolute what direction to pursue. It was now somewhat deep in the morning, and every thing was life and bustle in that commercial district, for the child was but a few streets above the Battery, and could detect the cool wave of its trees through a vista in the buildings. The harbor, glowing with sunshine and covered with every species of water craft, lay spread before her gaze. Brooklyn Heights, Jersey City, and the leafy shores of Hoboken, half veiled in the golden haze of a bright June morning, rose before her like soft glimpses of the fairy land she had loved to read about. Never in her life had she been in that portion of the city before, and she forgot everything in the strange beauty of a scene which few ever looked upon unmoved. The steamboats ploughing the silvery foam of the waters, curving around the Battery, darting in and out from every angle of the shore; the fine National vessels sleeping upon the waters, with their masts penciled against the sky, and their great, black hulls so imposing in their motionless strength; the ferry boats, the pretty barges and smaller kind of water craft, shooting with arrowy speed across the waves—all these things had a strange and absorbing effect on the child.

As she stood gazing upon the scene, there came looming up in the distant horizon an Ocean steamer, riding majestically on the waters that seemed to have suddenly heaved the monster up into the bright June atmosphere. At first the vast proportions of this sea monarch were lost in the distance, but it came up with the force and swiftness of some wild steed of the desert, and each moment its vast size became more visible. Up it came, black, swift, and full of majestic strength, ploughing the waters with a sort

of haughty power, as if spurning the element which had become its slave. Its great pipes poured forth a whirlwind of black, fleecy smoke, now and then flaked and lurid with fire, that whirled and whirled in the curling vapor till all its glow went out, rendering the thick volumes of smoke that streamed over the water still more dense and murky.

At first the child gazed upon this imposing object with a sensation of affright. Her large eyes dilated; her cheek grew pale with excitement: she felt a disposition to snatch up her basket and flee from the water's edge. But curiosity, and something akin to superstitious dread kept her motionless. She had heard of these great steamships, and knew that this must be one, yet it seemed to her like some dangerous monster tortured with black, fiery venom. She turned to an old sailor that stood near, his countenance glowing with enthusiasm, and muttering eagerly to himself.

"Oh! sir, it is only a ship—you are sure of that!" she said, for all her childish dread of strangers was lost in wonder at a sight so new and majestic.

The man turned and gave one glance at the mild, blue eyes and earnest face of the child.

"Why, bless your heart, what else should it be?—a ship to be sure it is—or at any rate, a sort of one, going by wind and fire both together; but arter all a clean rigged taught merchantman for me—that's the sort of craft for an old salt that's been brought up to study wind and water, not fire and smoke! But take care of your traps, little one, she'll be up to her berth in no time."

The child snatched up her basket and gave a hurried glance around, seeking for some means of egress from the wharf. But while she was occupied by the steamer, a crowd had gathered down to the water's edge, and she shrunk from attempting a passage through the mass of carts, carriages, and people that blocked up her way to the city.

"Poh! there's nothing to be afear'd of!" said the good-natured tar, observing her terrified look, "only take care of your traps, and its worth while waiting."

By this time the steamer was opposite Governor's Island. She made a bold curve around the Battery, and came up to her berth with a slow and measured beat of the engine, blowing off steam at intervals like a racer drawing breath after sweeping his course.

The deck of the steamer was alive with passengers, an eager crowd full of cheerfulness and expectation. Most of them were evidently from the higher classes of society, for their rich attire and a certain air of refined indifference was manifest even in the excitement of an arrival.

Among the rest Julia saw two persons that seemed to fascinate her attention in a most singular degree, drawing it from the whole scene till she saw and heeded nothing else.

One of these was a woman somewhat above the common size, and of superb proportions, who leaned against the railing of the steamer with a heavy, drooping bend, as if occupied with some deep and painful feeling. One glove was off, and her eager grasp upon the black wood-work seemed to start the blue veins up to the snowy surface of a hand, whose symmetry was visible even from the shore. Julia could not

remove her eyes from the strange and beautiful face of this woman. Deep but subdued agony was at work in every lineament. There was wildness in her very motion as she lifted her superb form from the railing, and drew the folds of a cashmere shawl over her bosom, pressing her hand hard upon the rich fabric, as if to relieve some painful feeling that it covered.

The steamer now lay close in her berth: a sort of moveable staircase was flung from the side to the wharf, and down this staircase came the passengers eager to touch the firm earth once more. Among the foremost was the woman who had so riveted the attention of little Julia; and, behind her, bearing a silver dressing-case and a small embroidered satchel, came a tall and singular looking man. Though his form was upright enough in itself, he bent forward in his walk; and his arms, long and awkward, seemed as the members of some other body that had by mistake been given up to his ungainly use. His dress was fine in material, but carelessly put on, ill-fitting and badly arranged in all its tints; a hat of fine beaver and foreign make, seemed flung on the back of his head, and settled tightly there by a blow on the crown; his great hands were gloveless; and his boots appeared at least a size too large for the feet they encased.

This man would now and then cast a glance from his small, grey eyes on the superb woman who preceded him; and it was easy to see by his countenance that he observed, and after his fashion shared the anguish visible in her features. His own face deepened in its expression of awkward sadness with every glance; and he hugged the dressing-case to his side with unconscious violence, which threatened to crush the delicate frost work that enriched it.

With a wild and tearless brightness in her large, blue eyes, the lady descended to the wharf, a few paces from the spot occupied by the little strawberry girl. As her foot touched the earth, Julia saw that the white hand dropped from its hold on the shawl, and the costly garment half fell from her shoulders, trailing the dirty wharf with its exquisite embroidery. In the whole crowd there was no object but this woman to the little girl: with a pale cheek and suspended breath she watched every look and motion. There was something almost supernatural in the concentration of her whole being on this one object. An irresolute desire to address the stranger—to meet the glance of her eyes—to hear her voice, seized upon the child. She sprang forward obeying this strange impulse, and seizing the soiled drapery of the shawl, held it up grasped in her trembling hands.

"Lady, your shawl." The child could utter no more. Those large, blue eyes were bent upon her face; her own seemed fascinated by the gaze; slowly, sadly they filled with tears, drop by drop, as the eyes of that strange, beautiful woman had filled also. Still she gazed upon the child, her clear, poverty-stricken dress—her meek face—and the basket of fruit and flowers upon her arm. The strange lady gazed, and a faint, sad smile crept around her mouth.

"This sweet voice—the flowers—is it not a beautiful welcome?" she said, glancing through her tears upon the man who stood close by her side: but the uncouth friend or servant—whatever he might be—

did not answer. His large eyes were riveted on the child, and some strange feeling seemed to possess him.

"Give me," said the lady, passing her hand over Julia's head with a caressing motion—"give me some of these roses: it is a long time since I have touched a flower grown in home soil!"

Julia selected her freshest bouquet and held it up. The lady's hand trembled as she drew forth her purse, and dropping a bright coin into the basket, received the flowers.

"Take a few of the strawberries, lady, they are so ripe and cool!" said the little girl, lifting one of the small baskets from its leafy nest.

Again the lady smiled through her tears, and, taking the little basket, poured a few of the strawberries into her ungloved hand.

"Would not he like some?" questioned the child, offering the basket with its scarcely diminished contents to the man, who still kept his eyes fixed steadily on her face.

"No, not them—but give me a bunch of the blue flowers, they grew around the rock spring at the old homestead, thousands and thousands on 'em!" cried the man, with a strong down East pronunciation, and securing a tuft of the violets he turned away, as if ashamed of the emotion he had betrayed.

The lady turned away. Something in his words seemed to have moved her greatly. She gathered the shawl about her, and moved toward a carriage that had drawn close up to the wharf.

Julia's heart beat quick; she could not bear to see that strange, beautiful woman depart without speaking to her again.

"Lady, will you take this one little bunch?—some people love violets better than anything!"

"No, no, I cannot—I—" The lady paused, tears seemed choking her. She drew down the folds of a rich blonde veil over her face and moved on.

Julia laid the violets back into her basket with a low sigh. Feelings of vague disappointment were saddening her heart. When she looked up again the lady had taken her seat in the carriage, and leaning out was beckoning to her.

"I will take the violets!" she said, reaching forth her hand that trembled as the simple blossoms were placed in it. "Heaven forbid that I should cast the sweet omen from me. Thank you, child—thank you."

The lady drew back into the carriage. Her face was clouded by the veil, but tears trembled in her voice, and that voice lingered upon Julia Warren's ear many a long month afterward. It had unlocked the deepest well-spring of her life.

The strawberry girl stood upon the wharf motionless and lost in thought minutes after the carriage drove away. She had forgotten the basket on her arm, everything in the strange regret that lay upon her young heart. Never, never would she meet that beautiful woman again. The thought filled her soul with unutterable loneliness. She was unconscious that another carriage had driven up, and that a Southern vessel, arrived that morning, was pouring forth luggage and passengers on the other side of the pier. She took no heed of anything that was passing around her, till a sweet, low voice close by, exclaimed—

"Oh! see those flowers—those beautiful, beautiful moss rose-buds!"

Julia looked up. A young girl with soft, dark eyes, and lips dewy and red as the buds she coveted, stood a few paces off, with her hand grasped by a tall and stately looking man, approaching middle age if not a year or two on the other side, who seemed anxious to hurry his companion into the carriage.

"Step in, Florence, the girl can come to us!" said the man, restraining the eager girl, who had withdrawn her foot from the carriage steps. "Come, come, lady bird, this is no place for us: see, half the crowd are looking this way."

The young lady blushed and entered the carriage, followed by her impatient companion, who beckoned Julia toward him.

"Here," he said, tossing a silver coin into her basket, "give me those buds, quick, and then get out of the way, or you will be trampled down."

Julia held up her basket, half terrified by the impatience that broke from the dark eyes bent upon her.

"There, sweet one, these might have ripened on your own smile: kiss them for my sake!" said the man, gently bending with his fragrant gift toward his lovely companion.

His voice soft, sweet and harmonious, fell upon the child's heart also; and while the tones melted into her memory, she shuddered as the flower may be supposed to shrink when a serpent creeps by.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1847, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52.

CHAPTER II.

"Wild as a bird, when first it tries the wing,—
Bright as the sun-beam glistening o'er a brook—
Sweet as the earliest blossom of the spring,
Was that young child, in every tone and look!"

In the basement of a low, rear building in one of those cross streets that grow more and more squalid as they stretch down to the water's edge, sat an aged couple, at nightfall, on the day when our humble heroine was presented to the reader. The room was damp, low, and dark; a couple of rude chairs, a deal table, and a long wooden chest were all the furniture it contained. A rough shelf ran over the mantle-piece, on which were arranged a half dozen unmatched cups and saucers, and a broken plate or two, and a teapot, minus half its spout, all scrupulously washed, and piled together with some appearance of ostentation. A brown platter, which stood on the table, contained the only approach to food that the humble dwelling afforded. A bone of bacon thrice picked, and retained probably from a wretched desire to possess something in the shape of food—though that something was but a mockery—and a fragment of bread lay upon the platter, covered with a neat crash towel. A straw-bed made up on one corner of the floor partook of the general neatness everywhere visible in the wretched dwelling, the sheets were of homespun linen, such as our down East house-wives loved to manufacture years ago, and the covering a patch-work quilt, formed of rich, old-fashioned chintz, was neatly turned under the edges—one might have known how more than precious was that fine old quilt by the great care taken to preserve it. The whole apartment bespoke extreme poverty in its most respectable form. Perfect destitution and scrupulous neatness so blended, that it made the heart ache with compassion, was visible everywhere.

The old couple drew their seats closer together on the hearth-stone, and looked wistfully in each other's faces as the darkness of coming night gathered around them. The bright morning had been succeeded by a chill, uncomfortable rain, and this increased tenfold the gloomy and dank atmosphere of the basement. Thus they sat gazing at each other, and listening moodily to the rain as it beat heavier and heavier upon the sidewalks.

"Come, come!" said the old woman, with a smile that she intended to be cheerful, but which was only a wan reflection of what she wished. "This is all very wrong: once to-day the Lord has sent us food, and here we are desponding again. Julia will be

cold and wet, poor thing; don't let her find us looking so hungry when she comes in."

"I was thinking of her," muttered the old man, in a sad voice. "Yes, the poor thing will be cold and wet and wretched enough, but that is nothing to the disappointment; she had built up such hopes this morning."

"Well, who knows after all, something may have happened!" said the old woman, with an effort at hopefulness.

"No, no," replied the man, in a voice of touching despondency, "if she had done anything the child would have been home long ago. She has no heart to come back."

The old man passed his hand over his eyes, and flung a handful of chips and shavings on the fire from a scant pile that lay in a corner. The blaze flashed up, revealing the desolate room for a moment, and then died away, flashing over the pale and haggard faces that bent over it, with a wan brilliancy that made them look absolutely corpse-like.

Though wrinkled and meagre with the lack of sustenance were those two miserable faces, still in the faded lineaments there lay nothing to revolt the heart. Patience sweet, and troubled affection, were blended with every grief-written line. But the wants of the body had stamped themselves sharply there. The thin lips were pale and fixed in an expression of habitual endurance. Their eyes were sharp and eager, dark arches lay around them, and these were broken by wrinkles that were not all of age.

As the flame blazed up, the old man turned and looked earnestly on his wife, a look of keen want, of newly whittened hunger broke from his eyes, naturally so meek and tranquil, and the poor old man turned his glance another way with a faint groan. It was a picture of terrible famine. Yet patience and affection flung a thrilling beauty over it.

One more furtive glance that old man cast on his wife, as the flame went down, and then he clasped his withered fingers, wringing them together.

"You are starving—you are more hungry than ever," he said, "and I have nothing to give you."

The poor woman lifted up her head and tried to smile, but the effort was heart-rending.

"It is strange," she said, "but the food we had this morning only seems to make me more hungry. Is it so with you, Benjamin? I keep thinking of it all the time. The rain as it splashes on the pavement seems like that warm coffee boiling over on the hearth, even the shavings as they lie in the corner are

constantly shifting before my eyes, and seem like rolls and twists of bread, which I have only to stoop forward and take."

The old man smiled wanly, and a tear started to his eyes, gliding down his cheek in the dim light.

"Let us try the bone once more," he said, after a brief silence, "there may be a morsel left yet."

"Yes, the bone! there may be something on the bone yet! In our good fortune this morning we must have forgotten to scrape it quite close!" cried the old woman, starting up with an eager look, and bringing the platter from the table.

The husband took it from her hands, and setting it down before the fire, knelt on one knee, and began to scrape the bone eagerly with a knife. "See, see!" he said, with a painful effort at cheerfulness, as some strips and fragments fell on the platter, leaving the bone white and glistening like ivory. "This is better than I expected! With the crust and a cup of clear cold water it will go a good way."

"No, no," said the woman turning her eyes resolutely away, "we had forgotten Julia. She scarcely tasted a mouthful this morning!"

"I know," said the old man, dropping his knife with a sigh.

"Put it aside, and let us try and look as if we had been eating all day. She would not touch it if—if——" Here the good old woman's eyes fell upon the little heap of food—those precious fragments which her husband had scraped together with his knife. The animal grew strong within her at the sight; she drew a sharp breath, and reaching forth her bony hand clutched them like a bird of prey; her thin lips quivered and worked with a sort of ferocious joy, as she devoured the little morsel, then, as if ashamed of her voracity, she lifted her glowing eyes to the form of her husband, and cast the fragment of food still between her fingers back upon the platter.

"I could not help it! Oh, Benjamin, I could not help it!" Big tears started in her eyes, and rolled penitently down her cheek. "Take it away! take it away!" she said, covering her face with both hands. "You see how ravenous the taste of food makes me!"

"Take it!" said the old man, thrusting the platter into her lap.

"No! no! You have not tasted a morsel; you—you—I am better now, much better!"

For one instant the old man's fingers quivered over the morsel still left upon the platter, for he was famished and craving more food, even as his wife had been, but his better nature prevailed, and dashing his hand away, he thrust the plate more decidedly into her lap.

"Eat!" he said. "Eat! I can wait, and God will take care of the child!"

But the poor woman waved the food away, still keeping one hand resolutely over her eyes. "No—no!" she said, faintly, "no—no!"

Her husband lifted the plate softly from her lap: she started, looked eagerly around, and sunk back in her chair, with a hysterical laugh.

"The strawberries! the strawberries, Benjamin! Only think, if Julia could not sell the strawberries

she will eat them, you know, all—all. Only think what a delicious feast the child will have! Bring back the meat; what will she care for that!"

The old man brought back the plate, but with a sorrowful look. He remembered that the strawberries entrusted to his grandchild were the property of another; but he could not find the heart to suggest this to the poor, famished creature before him, and he rejoiced at the brief delusion that would induce her to eat the little that was left. With martyr-like stoicism he stifled his own craving hunger, and sat by while his wife devoured the remainder of their precious store.

"And you have had none!" she said, with a piteous look of self-reproach, when her own sharp want was somewhat appeased.

"Oh, I can wait for Julia and the strawberries."

"And if that should fail," answered the poor wife, filled with remorse for her selfishness, or what she began to condemn as such, "if anything should have happened, you may pawn or sell the quilt to-morrow—I will say nothing against it—not a word. It was used for the first time when—when *she* was a baby, and——"

"And we have starved and suffered rather than part with it!" cried the old man, moving gloomily up and down the room, "while she—but why add to our distress by conjectures of what or where she may have been! Would she care though we all starved in a heap here, in this wretched cellar?"

"Oh, Benjamin, do not say this! She may be dead!"

The man did not seem to heed this pathetic appeal for his forbearance. The gnawing of hunger, the heavy gloom that lay everywhere around—even the presence of his wife, were forgotten in the train of anxious and bitter thoughts that a single word had brought upon him. He sat down again by the hearth, and with a thin hand pressed hard upon each knee, bent forward, gazing into the smouldering fire gloomy and silent. The old woman only stole one hand over his and pressed it gently. It returned no answering token of her sympathy, but still rigidly held its grasp on his knee. Thus minutes stole on; the rain came down more furiously; the winds shook the loose window panes, and the fire grew fainter and fainter, only shedding a smoky gloom over those two pale faces.

All at once there came a faint sound in the area—the moist plash of a footstep mingled with the sound of falling rain. Then the outer door opened, admitting a gush of damp wind into the hall that forced back the door of the basement, and there stood little Julia Warren, panting for breath, but full of wild and beautiful animation. The rain was dripping from her hood, and down the heavy braids of her hair, and her little feet left a wet print on the floor at every step.

The old man started eagerly up, and flung some fresh fuel on the fire, which instantly filled the basement with a brilliant but transitory light. There she stood, that brave little girl, dripping with wet, and deluged by the sudden light. Her cheeks were all in a glow, warm and wet, like roses in a storm. Her eyes were absolutely star-like in their brilliancy, and

her voice broke through the room in a joyful gush that made everything cheerful again.

"Did you think I was lost, grandpa, or drowned in the rain—don't it pour though? Here, grandma, come help me with the basket. Stop, till I light a candle, though." And the child knelt down in her dripping garments to ignite the candle, which she had taken somewhere from the depths of her basket. But her little hands shook, and the flame seemed to dance before her; she really could not hold the candle still enough for her purpose, that little form thrilled and shook so with her innocent joy.

"Here grandpa, you try," she said, surrendering the candle, while her laugh filled the room like the carol of birds, when all the trees are in blossom, "I never shall make it out; but don't think, now, that I am shivering with the wet, or tired out—don't think anything till I have told you all about it. There, now we have a light; come, come!"

The little girl dragged her basket to the hearth, and no fairy, telling down gold and rubies to a favorite, ever looked more lovely. Down by the basket the old grandparents fell upon their knees—one holding the light—the other crying like a child.

"See, grandpa, see; a beef-steak—a great, thick beef-steak, and pickles, and bread, and—and—do look, grandmother, this paper—what do you think is in it? oh! ha! I thought you would brighten up! tea, green tea, and sugar, and—why, grandfather, is that you crying so? Dear, dear, how can you? Don't you see how happy I am? Why, as true as I live, if I ain't crying myself all the time! Now, ain't it strange; every one of us crying, and all for what? I—I believe I shall die, I'm so happy!"

The excited little creature dropped the paper of tea from her trembling hands, as she uttered these broken words, and flinging herself on the old woman's bosom, clung to her, bathed in tears, and shaking like an aspen leaf, literally strengthless with the joy that her coming had brought to that desolate place.

While her arms were around the poor woman's neck, the grandmother kept her eyes fixed upon the basket, and she contrived to break a fragment from one of the loaves it contained, and greedily devour it amid those warm caresses.

Joy is often more restless than grief; Julia was soon on her feet again.

"There, there, grandmother! just let the bread alone: what is that to the supper we will have by-and-bye. I'll get three cents worth of charcoal, and borrow a gridiron, and—and—now don't eat more than half enough till I come back, because of the supper!"

The little girl darted out of the room as she uttered this last injunction, and her step was heard like the leap of a fawn, as she bounded through the passage. When she returned, the larger portion of a loaf had disappeared, and the old couple were in each other's arms, weeping, while fragments of prayer and thanksgiving fell from their lips. It was a beautiful picture of the human heart, when its holiest and deepest feelings are aroused. Gratitude to God and to his creatures shed a touching loveliness over it all. Julia with her bright eyes, and her eager little hands, bustled

about, quite too happy for a thought of the fatigue she had endured all the day. She drew forth the little table. She furbished and brightened up the cups and saucers, and gave an extra rub to the bright iron candlestick, which, was, for the first time in many a day, warmed up by a tall and snowy candle. The scent of the beef-steak as it felt the heat, the warm hiss of the tea-kettle, the crackling of the fire, made a cheerful accompaniment to her quick and joyous movements. The cold rain pattering without—the light gusts of wind that shook the windows only served to render the comfort within more delightful.

"There now," said Julia, wiping the bottom of her broken-spouted tea-pot, and placing it upon the table, "there now, all is ready! I'm to pour out the tea, grandpa must cut the steak, and you, grandma, oh, you are company to-night. Come, come, every thing is warm and nice."

The old people drew up to the humble board. A moment their grey heads were bent, while the little girl bowed her forehead gently downward, and veiled her eyes with their silken lashes, as if the joy sparkling there was suddenly clouded by a thought of her own forgetfulness in taking a seat before the half-breathed blessing was asked. But her heart was only subdued for a moment. Directly her hands began to flutter about the tea-pot, like a pair of humming birds, busy with some great, uncouth flower. She poured the rich amber stream forth with a dash, and as each lump of sugar fell into the cups, her mouth dimpled into fresh smiles. It was quite like a fairy feast to her. Too happy for thoughts of her own hunger, she was constantly dropping her knife and fork to push the bread to her grandfather, or heap the old grandma's plate afresh, and it seemed as if the broken tea-pot was perfectly inexhaustible, so constantly did she keep it circulating around the table.

"Isn't it nice, grandma, green tea and such sugar. What, grandpa! you haven't got through yet?" she was constantly saying, if either of the old people paused in the enjoyment of their meal, for it seemed to her as if such unusual happiness ought to last a long, long time:

"Yes," said the old man, at length pushing back his plate with a pleasant sigh, and more pleasant smile; "yes, Julia, now let us see you eat something, then tell us how all these things came about. You must have been very lucky to have coined a meal like this with one day's work.

"A meal!" cried the child, "Oh! the supper. You relished the supper, grandpa?"

"Yes; you hardly guessed how hungry we were, or how keenly we should have relished anything."

"But—but, you are wondering where the next will come from. You think me like a child in having spent so much in this one famous supper."

"Yes, like a child, a good, warm-hearted child, who could blame you?"

"Blame!" cried the grandmother, with tears in her eyes; "blame! God bless her!"

"But then," said the child, shaking her head and forcing back a tear that broke through the sunshine in her eyes, "one should not spend everything at once; grandpa means that, I suppose?"

"No, no!" answered the old woman, eagerly, "he does not mean to find the least fault. How should he?"

"It would have been childish though; but perhaps I should have done it, who knows—one don't stop to think with a bright half dollar in one hand, and a poor old grandfather and grandmother hungry at home. But then look here!"

The child drew a coin from her bosom, and held it up in the candlelight.

"Gold!" cried the astonished grandfather, absolutely turning pale with surprise.

"A half eagle, a genuine half eagle, as I am alive!" exclaimed the old woman, taking the coin between her fingers and examining it eagerly.

"Yes, gold—a half eagle," answered the exulting child, clasping her small hands on the table, "worth five dollars—the old woman in the market told me so!—five dollars, only think of that!"

"But you did not earn it," said the old man, gravely.

"Earn it—oh, no," said the little girl, with a joyous laugh, "who ever thought of a little girl like me earning five dollars in a day? Still I don't know. That good woman at the market told me to let every one give what he liked for the flowers, and so I did. The most beautiful lady you ever set eyes on took a bunch of rose-buds from my basket and flung that money in the place."

"But who was this lady? There may be some mistake. She might not have known that it was gold!" said the old man, reaching over, and taking the half eagle from his wife.

"I think she knew; indeed I am quite sure she did," answered the child, "for she looked at the piece as she took it from her purse. She knew what it was worth, but I didn't."

"Well, that we may know what to think, tell us more about this wonderful day," said the old man, still examining the gold with an anxious expression of countenance. "Your grandmother has finished her tea, and will listen now."

Julia was somewhat subdued by her grandfather's grave air; but spite of this, tears and smiles struggled in her eyes, and her mouth, now tremulous, now simpering, could hardly be trained into anything like serious narrative.

"Well," she said, shaking back the braids of her hair, and resolutely folding both hands in her lap. "Very well; please don't ask any questions till I have done, and I'll do my best to tell every thing just as it happened." You know how I went out this morning about the basket that I got trusted for at the grocery, and all that. Well, I went off with the new basket on my arm, making believe to myself as bold as a lion. Still I could but just keep from crying—everything felt so strange, and I was frightened too—you don't know how frightened! The babes in the woods must have felt as I did, only I had no brother with me, and it is a great deal more lonesome to wander through lots of cold looking men and women that you never saw before, than to be lost among the green woods, where flowers lie everywhere in the moss, and the trees are all sorts of colors, with birds

hopping and singing about—dear little birds, such as covered the poor babes with leaves, and—and—finally, grandmother, as I was saying, I felt more lonesome and down-hearted than these children could have done, for they had plenty of blackberries, you know, but I was dreadfully hungry—I was indeed, though I would not own it to you; and then all the windows were full of nice tarts and candies, just as if the people had put them there to see how bad they could make me feel. Well, I have told you about going into the market, and how my heart seemed to grow colder and colder, till I saw that good woman—that dear, blessed woman——"

"God bless her, for that one kind act!" exclaimed the old man, fervently.

"He *will* bless her; be quite sure of that," chimed in the good grandame.

"I wish you could have seen her—I only wish you could!" cried the child, in her sweet, eager gratitude, "perhaps you will some day, who knows?" And in the same sweet, disjointed language, the child went on relating her adventures along the streets, and on the wharf, where for the first time she had seen an ocean steamer. When she spoke of the lady and her strange attendant, the old people seemed to listen with more absorbing interest. They were keenly excited by the ardent admiration expressed by the child, yet to themselves even this feeling was altogether unaccountable. When the little girl spoke of the strange man whom she had met on the wharf also, her voice became subdued, and there was a half terrified look in her eyes. The singular impression which that man had left upon her young spirit seemed to haunt it like a fear, but the moment she related how he drove away with his beautiful companion, her courage seemed to return, she glanced brightly around, and went on with her narrative with renewed spirit.

"He had just gone," she said, "and I was beginning to look around for some way to leave the wharf, when I happened to see a handkerchief lying at my feet. The carriage wheel had run over it, and it was crushed down in the mud. I picked it up, and ran after the carriage, for the handkerchief was fine as a cobweb, and worth ever so much, I dare say. In and out, through the carts, and trunks, and people, I ran with my basket on my arm, and the muddy handkerchief in one hand. Twice I saw the carriage, but it was too far ahead, and at last I turned a corner—I lost it there, and stood thinking what I should do, when the very carriage which I had seen go off with the lady in it passed by; the lady had stopped for something, I suppose, and that kept her back. She was looking from the window that minute. I thought perhaps the handkerchief was her's, after all; so I ran off the side walk and shook it, that she might take notice. The carriage stopped; down came the driver and opened the door, and then the lady leaned out, and smiling with a sort of mournful smile, and said,

"Well, little girl, what do you want now?"

"I held up the handkerchief, but was quite out of breath, and could only say, 'this—this—is it your's, ma'am?'"

"She took the handkerchief, and turned to a corner

where a name was marked. Then her cheek turned pale as death, and her mouth so full, so red, grew white. I should have thought that she was dying, but she fixed her eyes on me so wildly.

"Come in, come in, this instant," she said, and before I could speak, she caught hold of my arm, and drew me—basket and all—into the carriage. The door was shut, and in my fright I heard her tell the man to drive fast. I did not speak; it seemed like dreaming. There sat the lady, so pale, so altered, with the handkerchief, all muddled as it was, crushed hard in her white hand—sometimes looking with a sort of wild look at me, sometimes seeming to think of nothing on earth. The carriage went faster and faster: I was frightened and began to cry, but she looked at me very kindly then, and said—

"Hush, child, hush! no one will harm you." Still I could not keep from sobbing, for it all seemed very wild and strange.

"Then the carriage stopped before a great stone house, with so many long windows and iron work all before it. No one came to the door. The strange man who rode with the driver let us in with a key that he had, and everything was as still as a meeting-house when we went in. The lady took my hand, and led me up a great high stair-case, covered from top to bottom with a carpet that seemed made of roses and wood-moss. Every thing was still and half dark, for all the windows were covered deep with silk curtains, and it had begun to cloud up out of doors.

"The lady opened a door, and led me into a room more beautiful than anything I ever set eyes on. But this was dark and dim like the rest. My feet sunk into the carpet, and everything I touched seemed made of flowers, the seats were so silken and downy.

"The lady flung off her shawl, and sat down upon a little sofa covered with blue silk. She drew me close to her, and tried to smile.

"Now," she said, 'you must tell me, little girl, exactly where you got the handkerchief!'

"I found it—indeed I found it on the wharf," I said, as well as I could, for crying. 'At first I thought it must belong to the tall gentleman, but he drove away so fast; then I saw your carriage, and thought—'

"She stopped me before I could say the rest—her eyes were bright as diamonds, and her cheeks grew red again.

"The tall gentleman! What tall gentleman?" she said.

"I told her about the man with the beautiful lady. Before I had done she let go of my hand, and fell back on the sofa; her eyes were shut, but down

through the black lashes the great tears kept rolling, till the silk cushion under her head was wet with them. I felt sorry to see her so troubled, and took the handkerchief from the floor—for it fell from her hand as she sunk down. With one corner that the wheel had not touched, I tried to wipe away the tears from her face, but she started up, all in a tremble, and pushed me away, but not as if she were angry with me, only as if she hated the handkerchief to touch her face. She walked about the room a few times, and then seemed to get quite natural again. By-and-bye the queer looking man came up with a satchel and a silver box, under his arm; and she talked with him in a low voice. He seemed not to like what she said; but she grew positive, and he went out. Then she lay down on the sofa again, as if I had not been by; her two hands were clasped under her head; she breathed very hard, and the tears now and then came in drops down her cheeks.

"It was getting dark, and I could hear the rain pattering outside. I spoke softly, and said that I must go. She did not seem to hear; so I waited, and spoke again. Still she took no notice. Then I took up my basket and went out. Nobody saw me. The great house seemed empty—everything was grand, but so still that it made me afraid.

"I had no idea where I was, or what street to take after this, but went up one street and down another, inquiring the way, till after a long, long walk, I got back to the market, quite tired out and anxious.

"The good market woman was so pleased to see me again. I gave her all my money, and she counted it, and took out pay for the flowers and strawberries. There was enough without the gold piece; she would not let me change that, but filled the basket with nice things, just to encourage me to work hard next week. There, now, grandfather, I have told you all about this wonderful day. Isn't it quite like a fairy tale?"

The old man sat gazing on the sweet and animated face of his grandchild; his hands were clasped upon the table, and his aged face grew luminous with Christian gratitude. Slowly his forehead bent downward, and he answered her in the solemn and beautiful words of Scripture, "I have been young, and now I am old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread." There was pathos and fervency in the old man's voice, solemn even as the words it syllabled. The little strawberry girl bowed her head with gentle feeling, and the grandmother whispered a meek "Amen."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1847, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 99.

CHAPTER III.

"There are some feelings grief cannot bemoan,
Nor torture shake." CHILDE HAROLD.

LITTLE Julia Warren had given a very correct description of the house to which she had been so strangely conveyed. Grand, imposing, and unsurpassed for magnificence by anything known in our city, it was nevertheless filled with a sort of gorgeous gloom that fell like a weight upon the beholder. Most of the shutters were closed, and rich draperies muffled and tinted the light wherever it penetrated a crevice, or struggled through the reversed fold of a blind. As you passed through those sumptuous rooms, so vast, so still, it seemed like traversing a flower-garden by the faintest starlight: you knew that beautiful objects lay around you on every side, without the power of distinguishing them, save in shadowy masses; all this indistinctness took a strong hold on the imagination rendered more powerful, perhaps, by the profound stillness that reigned in the dwelling.

Since the great front door had fallen softly to its latch, after the little girl left the building, no sound had broken the intense hush of the dwelling. Still the lady, who had so marvelously impressed herself upon the heart of that child, lay prone upon the couch in her boudoir in the second story. She was the only living being in that whole dwelling, and but for the quick breath that now and then disturbed her bosom, she might have appeared lifeless as the marble Flora that seemed scattering lilies over the cushion where she rested.

After a time the stillness seemed to startle her. She lifted her head and looked around the room.

"Gone!" she said, in a tone of disappointment, which had something of impatience in it—"gone!"

The lady started up, pale and with an imperious motion, as one whose faintest wish had seldom been opposed. She approached a window, and flinging back the curtains of amber damask, cast another searching look over the room. But the pale, sweet features of the Flora smiling down upon her lilies, was the only semblance to a human being that met her eye—she dropped the curtain impatiently. The statue seemed mocking her with its cold, classic smile. It suited her better when the wind came with a sweep, dashing the rain-drops fiercely against the window. The irritation which this sound produced on her nerves seemed to animate her with keen anxiety to find the child who had disappeared so noiselessly. She went to the door, traversed the hall

and the great staircase; and her look grew almost wild when she found no signs of the little girl! Two or three times she parted her lips as if to call out, but the name that she would have uttered clung to her heart, and the parted lips gave forth no sound. It was strange that a name, buried in her bosom for years, unuttered, hidden as the miser hides his gold, at once the joy and agony of his life, should have sprung to her memory there and then; but so it was, and the very attempt to syllable that name seemed to freeze up the animation in her face. She grew much paler after that, and her delicate fingers clung to the silver knob like marble, as she opened the hall door and looked into the street.

The entrance to the mansion was sheltered, and though the rain was falling, it had not yet penetrated to the threshold. Up and down the broad street no object resembling the strawberry girl could be seen; and with an air of disappointment the lady was about to close the door, when she saw upon the threshold a broken rose-bud, which had evidently fallen from the child's basket, and beside it the prints of a little, naked foot left in damp tracery on the granite. These foot-prints descended the steps, and with a sigh the lady drew back, closing the door after her gently as she had opened it.

She stood awhile musing in the hall, then slowly mounting the stairs, entered the boudoir again. She sat down, but it was only for a minute; the solitude of the great house might have shaken the nerves of a less delicate woman, now that the rain was beating against the windows, and the gloom thickening around her, but she seemed quite unconscious of this. Some new idea had taken possession of her mind that had power to arouse her whole being. She paced the room, at first gently, then with rapid footsteps, becoming more and more excited each moment; though this was only manifested by the brilliancy of her eyes, and the breathless eagerness with which she listened from time to time. No sound came to her ears, however—nothing but the rain beating, beating, beating against the plate-glass.

The lady took out her watch, and a faint, mocking smile stole over her lips. It seemed as if she had been expecting the return of her servant for hours; and lo! only half an hour had passed since he went forth.

"And this," she said, with a gesture and look of self-reproach—"this is the patience—this the stoicism which I have attained—Heaven help me!" She walked slower then, and at length sunk upon

the couch with her eyes closed resolutely as one who forced herself to wait and be still. Thus she remained, perhaps fifteen minutes, and the marble statue smiled upon her through its chill, white flowers.

She had wrestled with herself and conquered. So much time! Only fifteen minutes, but it seemed an hour. She opened her eyes, and there was that smiling face of marble peering down into hers, it seemed as something human were scanning her heart. The fancy troubled her, and she began to walk about again.

As the lady was pacing to and fro in her boudoir, her foot became entangled in the handkerchief which she had so passionately wrested from the strawberry girl, when in her gentle sympathy the child would have wiped the tears from her eyes. She took the cambric in her hand, not without a shudder, it might be of pain, it might be that some hidden joy blended itself with the emotion, but with an effort at self-control she turned to a corner of the handkerchief, and examined a name written there with attention. Again some powerful change of feeling seemed to sweep over her; she folded the handkerchief with care, and went slowly out of the room, still holding it in her hand. Slowly, and as if impelled against her wishes, this singular woman mounted to the upper story of the dwelling. Even here the same silent splendor, the same magnificent gloom that pervaded the whole dwelling, was darkly visible. Though perfectly alone, carpets thick as a forest moss-bed muffled her footsteps, till they gave forth no echo to betray her presence. Like a spirit she glided on, and but for her breathing she might have been taken for something truly supernatural, so singular was her pale beauty, so strangely motionless were her eyes.

For a moment the lady paused, as if calling up the locality of some object in her mind, and then she opened the door of a small room and entered.

A wonderful contrast did that little chamber present to the splendor through which she had just passed. No half twilight reigned there, no gleams of rich coloring awoke the imagination; everything was chaste and almost serene in its simplicity. Half a shutter had been left open, and thus a cold light was admitted to the chamber, revealing every object with chilling distinctness:—the white walls; the faded carpet on the floor; and the bed piled high with feathers, and covered with a patchwork quilt pieced from many gorgeously colored prints, now somewhat faded and mellowed by age. Half a dozen stiff maple chairs stood in the room. In one corner was a round mahogany stand, polished with age, and between the windows hung a looking-glass framed in curled maple. No one of these articles bore the slightest appearance of recent use, and common place as they would have seemed in another dwelling, in that house they looked mysteriously out of keeping.

The lady looked around as she entered the room, and her face expressed some new and strong emotion; but she had evidently schooled her feelings, and a strong will was there to second every mental effort. After one quick survey her eyes fell upon the carpet. It was a humble fabric, such as the New England housewives manufacture with their own looms and spinning-wheels; stripes of hard, positive

colors contrasted harshly together, and even time had failed to mellow them into harmony: though faded and dim, they still spread away from the feet harsh and disagreeable. No indifferent person would have looked upon that cheerless object twice, but it seemed to fascinate the gaze of that singular woman as no artistic combination of colors could have done. Her eyes grew dim as she gazed; her step faltered as she moved across the faded stripes; and reaching a chair near the bed, she sunk upon it pale and trembling. The tremor went off after a few minutes, but her face retained its painful whiteness, and she fell into thought so deep that her attitude took the repose of a statue.

Thus an hour went by. The storm had increased, and through the window which opened upon a garden might be seen the dark sway of the branches tossed by the roaring wind, and blackened with the gathering night. The rain poured down in sheets, and beat upon the spacious roof like the rattle of artillery. Gloom and commotion reigned around. The very elements seemed vexed with new troubles as that beautiful woman entered the room whose humble simplicity seemed so unsuited to her. She saw nothing of the storm, or if she did, the wildness and gloom seemed but a portion of the tumult in her own heart. Yet how still and calm she was—that strange being! At length the chain of iron thought seemed broken; she turned toward the bed, laid her hand gently down upon the quilt, and gazed at the faded colors till some string in her proud heart gave way, and sinking down with her face buried in the scant pillows, she wept like a child. Every limb in her body began to tremble. The bed shook under her, and notwithstanding the stormy elements, the noise of her bitter sobs filled the room. The voice of her grief was soon broken by another sound—the sound of passionate kisses lavished upon the pillows, the quilt, and the homespun linen upon the bed. She looked at them through her tears: she smoothed them out with her trembling hands: she laid her cheek against them lovingly, as a punished child will sometimes caress the very garments of a mother whose forgiveness it craves. Yet in all this you saw that this strange, almost insane excitement was not usual to the woman, that she was not one to yield her strength to a light passion; and this made her grief the more touching. You felt that if such storms often swept across her track of life, she did not bow herself to them without a fierce struggle. She lay upon the bed weeping and faint with exhausted emotion, when the sound of a closing door rang through the building. This was followed by stumbling footsteps so heavy that even the turf-like carpets could not muffle them. The lady started up, listened an instant, and then hurried from the room, closing the door carefully after her. It was now almost dark, and but for the angular figure and ungainly attitude of the person she found in her boudoir, she might not have recognized the man who stood waiting her approach.

"Jacob, you have come—well!" said the lady, in a low voice.

"Yes, and a pretty time I have had of it," said the man, drawing back from the hand which she had

almost placed upon his arm, and shaking himself with much of the surliness, and all the indifference of a mastiff, till the rain fell in showers from his coat. "I am soaking wet, ma'am, and dangerous to come near: it might give you a cold."

"It is raining then?" said the lady, constraining her impatience.

"Raining! I should think it was, and blowing too. Why don't you hear the wind yelling and tusseling with the trees back of the house?"

"I have not noticed," answered the lady, mournfully; "I was thinking of other things."

"Of him, I suppose!" There was something husky in the man's voice as he spoke, the more remarkable that his strong down East pronunciation was usually prompt and clear from any signs of feeling.

"Yes, of him and of them! Jacob, this has been a terrible day to me."

"And to me, gracious knows!" muttered the man, giving his coat another rough shake.

"Yes, you have been upon your feet all day—you are wet through, my kind friend, and all to serve me—I know that it is hard!"

"Nothing of the sort—nothing of the sort! Who on earth complained, I should like to know. A little rain, poh!" exclaimed the man, evidently annoyed that his vexation, uttered in an under tone, should have reached the lady's ear.

"No, you never do complain, Jacob; and yet you have often found me an exacting mistress—or friend I should rather say—for it is long since I have considered you as anything else. I have often taxed your strength and patience too far!"

"There it is again!" answered the man, with a sort of rough impatience, which, however, had nothing unkind or disrespectful in it—"just as if I was complaining or discontented—just as if I wasn't your hired man—no, servant, that is the word—to serve, wait, tend on you; and hadn't been ever since the day—but no matter about that—just now I've been down town as you ordered."

"Well!"

Oh! how much of exquisite self-control was betrayed by the low, steady tone in which that little word was uttered.

"Of course," said the man, "I could do nothing without help. The little girl's story was enough to prove that—that he was in town, but that only went so far. Neither knew which way he drove, or how the coach was numbered; so it seemed very much like searching for a needle in a hay-mow. But you wanted to know where he was, and I determined to find out. Wal, this morning, as we left the steamer, I saw a man in the crowd with a great, gilt star on his breast, and as the thing looked rather odd for a republican, I asked what it meant. It was a policeman, they have got up a new system here in the city, it seems, and from what was said at the wharf, I thought it no bad idea to get some of these men to help me search for Mr. Leicester."

"Hush, hush; don't speak so loud," said the lady, starting as a name her lips had not uttered for years, was thus suddenly pronounced.

"I inquired the way, and went to the police-office

at once: it is in the Park, ma'am, back of the City Hall. Wal, there I found the chief, a smart, active fellow as I ever set eyes on; I told him what brought me there, and who I wanted to find. He called a young man from the out room; wrote on a slip of paper; gave it to the man, and asked me to sit down. Wal, I sat down, and we began to talk about my travels, and things in general, like old acquaintances, till by and bye in came the very policeman that I had seen on the wharf.

"Mr. Johnson," says the chief, "a Southern vessel arrived to-day at the same wharf where the steamer lies. Did you observe a very tall gentleman, with a young lady on his arm, leave that vessel?"

"Dark hair; large eyes; a black coat?" says the man, looking at me.

"Exactly," says I.

"The lady beautiful; eyes you could hardly tell the color of; lashes always down; black silk dress; cashmere scarf; cottage-bonnet!" says he, again.

"Jist so!" says I.

"Yes," says he, to the chief, "I saw them."

"Where did they go?" questions the chief.

"Hack No. 117 took three fares from the vessel and steamer, one to the City Hall, one to the New York, one to the Astor. This was the second, he went to the Astor."

"And the young girl—did she go with him?" cried the lady, striving in vain to conceal the keen interest which prompted the question.

"That was just what the chief asked," was the reply.

"And the answer—was she with him?"

"Wal, the chief put that question, only a little steadier; and the man answered that the young lady——"

"Well."

"That the coachman first took the young lady to a house in—I believe it was Ninth street, or Tenth, or——"

"No matter, so she was not with him," answered the lady, drawing a deep breath, while an expression of exquisite relief came to her features; "and he is there at the Astor House. And I in the same city! Does nothing tell him?—has his heart no voice that clamors as mine does? The Astor House! Jacob, how far is the Astor House from this?"

"More than a mile—two miles. I don't exactly know how far it is."

"A mile, perhaps two, and that is all that divides us. Oh! God, would that it were all!" she cried, suddenly clasping her hands with a burst of wild agony.

The servant man recoiled as he witnessed this burst of passion, wherefore it were difficult to say; for he remained silent, and the twilight had gathered fast and deep in the room. For several minutes no word was spoken between the two persons so unlike in looks, in mind, in station, and yet linked together by a band of sympathy strong enough to sweep all these inequalities into the dust. At length the lady lifted her head, and looked at the man almost beseechingly through the twilight.

The storm was still fierce. The wind shook and

toe through the foliage of the trees; and the rain swept by in sheets, now and then torn with lightning, and shaken with loud bursts of thunder.

"The storm is terrible!" said the lady, with a sad, winning smile, and with her beautiful eyes bent upon the man.

He thought that she was terrified by the lightning, and this brought his kind nature back again.

"This—oh! this is nothing, madam. Think of the storms we used to have in the Alps, and at sea."

A beautiful brilliancy came into the lady's eyes.

"True, this is nothing compared to them: and the evening, it is not yet entirely dark!"

"The storm makes it dark—that is all. It isn't far off from sun-down by the time!" answered Jacob, taking out an old silver watch, and examining it by the window.

"Jacob, are you very tired?"

"Tired, ma'am! What on earth should make me tired? One would think I had been hoeing all day, to hear such questions!"

The lady hesitated. She seemed ashamed to speak again, and her voice faltered as she at length forced herself to say—

"Then, Jacob, as you are not quite worn out—perhaps you will get me a carriage—there must be stables in the neighborhood."

"A carriage!" answered the man, evidently overwhelmed with surprise: "a carriage, madam, to-night, in all this rain!"

"Jacob—Jacob, I must see him—I must see him now, to-night—this hour! The thought of delay suffocates me—I am not myself—do you not see it? All power over myself is gone. Jacob, I must see him now, or die!"

"But the storm, madam," urged poor Jacob, from some cause almost as pale as his mistress.

"The better—all the better. It gives me courage. How can we two meet save in storm and strife? I tell you the tempest will give me strength."

"I beg of you. I—I—"

"Jacob, be kind, get me the carriage!" pleaded the lady, gently, interrupting him: "urge nothing more, I entreat you; but instead of opposing, help me. Heaven knows but for you I am helpless enough!"

There was no resisting the voice, the pleading eloquence of those eyes. A deep sigh was smothered in that faithful breast, and then he went forth perfectly heedless of the rain; which, to do him justice, had never been considered in connection with his own personal comfort.

He returned after a brief absence; and a dark object at the door, over which the rain was dripping in streams, bespoke the success of his errand. The lady had meantime changed her dress to one of plain black silk, perfectly plain, giving no evidence of position, by which a stranger might judge from what class of society she came; a neat, straw bonnet and a shawl completed her modest costume.

"I am ready, waiting!" she cried, as Jacob presented himself at the door, and drawing down her veil that he might not see all that was written in her face, she passed him and went forth.

But Jacob caught one glance of that countenance with all its eloquent feeling, for a small lamp had been lighted in the boudoir during his absence; and that look was enough. He followed her in silence.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1847, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 147.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE in one of the most sumptuous chambers of the Astor House, sat the man who had made an impression so powerful upon little Julia Warren that morning. Though the chill of that stormy night penetrated even the massive wall of the hotel, it had no power to throw a shadow upon the comforts with which this man had found means to surround himself. A fire blazed in the grate, shedding a glow upon the rug where his feet were planted, till the embroidered slippers that encased them seemed buried in a bed of forest moss.

The curtains were drawn close, and the whole room had an air of snugness and seclusion seldom found at a hotel. Here stood an open dressing-case of ebony, with its gold mounted and glittering equipments exposed; there was a travelling desk of ebony, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, opal-tinted and glittering like gems in the uncertain light. Upon the mantel-piece stood a small picture-frame carved to a perfect net-work, and apparently of pure gold, circling the miniature of a female, so exquisitely painted, so beautiful in itself, that the heart warmed to a glow while gazing upon it. It was a portrait of the very girl whom Julia had seen supported by that man's arm in the morning—new and fresh was every tint upon the ivory. Alas! no female face ever had time to grow shadowy and mellow in that little frame; with almost every change of the moon some new head was circled by the glittering net-work—and this spoke eloquently of one dark trait in the character of the man.

He sat before the fire, leaning back in his cushioned easy-chair, now glancing with an indolent smile at the picture, now leaning toward a small table at his elbow, and helping himself to the fragment of some tiny game-birds from a plate where several were lying, all somewhat mutilated, as if he had tried each without perfectly satisfying his fastidious appetite. Various foreign condiments, and several flasks of wine stood on the table, with rich china and glasses of unequal shape, and variously tinted. For at the hotel this man was known to be as fastidious in his taste as in his appetite; with him the appointments of a meal were equally important with the viands.

No lights were in the room, save two wax tapers in small candle-sticks of frosted silver, which with various articles of plate upon the table, composed a portion of his travelling luxuries. If we have dwelt long upon these small objects, it is because they bespoke the character of the man better than any philosophical analysis of which we are capable, and from

a feeling of reluctance to come in close contact with the hard and selfish even in imagination. Oh! if the pen were only called upon to describe the pure and the good, what a pleasant task might be this of authorship; but while human life is made up of the evil and the good in order to be true, there must be many dark shadows in every picture of life as it exists now, and has existed from the beginning of the world. In humanity as in nature herself, there is midnight darkness contrasting with the bright, pure sunshine.

There was nothing about the person of Leicester that should make the task of describing him an unpleasant one. He had reached the middle age, at least was fast approaching it: and on a close scrutiny his features gave indication of more advanced years than the truth would justify; for his life had been one that seldom leaves the brow smooth, or the mouth perfectly flexible. Still to a casual observer Leicester was a noble-looking and elegant man. The dark gloss and luxuriance of his hair was in nothing impaired by the few threads of silver that began to make themselves visible; his forehead was high, broad and white; his teeth perfect, and though the lips were somewhat heavy, the smile that at rare intervals stole over them was full of wily fascination, wicked, but indescribably alluring. That smile had won many a new face to the little frame from which poor Ellen Craft seemed to gaze upon him with mournful tenderness through the twilight.

As he gazed upward it deepened, spread and quivered about his mouth, that subtle and insatiable smile. There was something of tenderness, something of indolent scorn blended with it then, for his eyes were lifted to that beautiful face gazing upon him so from the ivory. He caught the mournful expression, cast, perhaps, by the position of the candles, and it was this that gave a new character to his smile. He stretched himself languidly back in his chair, clasped both hands behind his head, and still gazed upward with half closed eyes. This change of position loosened the heavy cord of silk with which a dressing-gown, lined with crimson velvet, and of a rich cashmere pattern, had been girded to his waist, thus exposing the majestic proportions of a person strong, sinewy and full of flexible vigor. His vest was off, and the play of his heart might have been counted through the fine and plaited linen that covered his bosom. Something more than the rise and fall of a base heart had that loosened cord exposed. Protruding from an inner pocket of his dressing-gown the butt of a revolver was just visible. Thus surrounded by luxuries, with a weapon of death close to

his heart, Edward Leicester sat gazing with half-shut eyes upon the mute shadow that returned his look with such mournful intensity. At length the smile upon his lip gave place to words full of meaning, treacherous and more carelessly cruel than the smile had foreshadowed.

"Oh! Nell, Nell," he said, "your time will soon come. This excessive devotion—this wild love—it tires one, child—you are unskilful, Nell—a little spice of the evil—one—a storm of anger—now a dash of indifference—anything but the eternal tenderness. It gets to be a bore at last, Nell, indeed it does."

And Leicester waved his head at the picture, smiling gently all the time. Then he unsealed one of the wine-flasks, filled a glass and lifted it to his mouth. After tasting the wine with a soft, oily smack of the lips, and allowing a few drops to flow down his throat, he put aside the glass with a look of disgust, and leaning forward rang the bell.

Before his hand left the bell-tassel, a servant was at the door, not in answer to his summons, but with information that a carriage had stopped at the private entrance, and that some person within wished to speak with him.

Leicester seemed annoyed. He drew the cords of his dressing-gown and stood up.

"Who is in the carriage? What does he seem like, John?"

The mulatto smiled till his teeth glistened in the candle-light.

"Why don't you speak, fellow?"

The waiter cast a shy glance toward the picture on the mantel-piece, and his teeth shone again.

"The night is dark as pitch, sir, I couldn't see a yard from the door; but I heard a voice. It wasn't a man's voice."

"A woman!—in all this storm too. Surely *she* cannot have been so wild," cried Leicester, casting aside his dressing-gown, and hastily re-placing it with garments more befitting the night. "Go, John, and say that I will be down presently, and listen as you give the message; try and get a glimpse at the lady."

John disappeared, and threaded his way to the entrance with wonderful alacrity. A man stood upon the steps apparently indifferent to the rain that beat sharply in his face. By changing his position he might have avoided half the violence of each new gust, but he seemed to feel a sort of pleasure in braving it, for a stern pallor lay upon the face thus steadily turned to the storm.

This was the man who had first spoken to the servant, but instead of addressing him John was passing to the carriage, intent on learning something of its inmate. But as he went down the steps a strong grasp was fixed on his arm, and he found himself suddenly wheeled face to face with the powerful man upon the steps.

"Where are you going?" There was something in the man's voice that made the mulatto shake.

"I was going to the carriage, sir, with Mr. Leicester's message to the—the—" Here John began to stammer, for he felt the grasp upon his arm tighten like a vice.

"I sent for Mr. Leicester to come down; give me his answer!"

"Yes—yes, sir, certainly. Mr. Leicester will be down in a minute," stammered John, shaking the rain from his garments, and drawing back to the doorway the moment he was released, but casting a furtive glance into the darkness, anxious if possible to learn something of its inmate.

That moment, as if to reward his vigilance, the carriage window was let down, and by the faint light that struggled from the lanterns, the mulatto saw a white hand thrust forth: and a face of which he could distinguish nothing, save that it was very pale, and lighted by a pair of large eyes fearfully brilliant, gleamed on him for an instant.

"What is it? Will he not come? Open the door—open the door," cried a voice that rang even through his inert heart. It was a female's voice full and clear, but evidently excited to an unnatural tone by some powerful feeling.

Again the mulatto attempted to reach the carriage.

"Madam—Mr. Leicester will——"

Before the sentence was half uttered the mulatto found himself reeling back against the door, and the man who hurled him there darted down the steps.

"Shut the window—sit further back for gracious sake."

"Is he coming? Is he here?" was the wild rejoinder.

"He is coming; but do be more patient."

"I will—oh! I will!" cried the lady, and without another word she drew back into the darkness.

Meantime the mulatto found his way back to the chamber where Mr. Leicester was waiting with no little impatience. The very imperfect report which he was enabled to give relieved Mr. Leicester from his first apprehension, and excited a wild spirit of adventure in its place.

"Who in the name of Heaven can it be," broke from him as he was looking for his hat. "The face, John, you saw the face, ha!"

"Only something white, sir; and the eyes—such eyes, large and shining—a great deal brighter than the lamp that was half put out with the rain!"

"It cannot be, Nell, that is certain," muttered Leicester, as he took up his dressing-gown from the floor and transferred the revolver to an inner pocket of his coat—"some old torment, perhaps, or a new one. Well, I'm ready."

Leicester found the carriage at the entrance, its outlines only defined in the surrounding darkness by the pale glimmer of a lamp, whose companion had been extinguished by the rain. Upon the steps, but lower down, and close by the carriage, stood the immovable figure of that self-constituted sentinel. As Leicester presented himself on the steps above, this man threw open the carriage door, but kept his face turned away even from the half dying lamp-light.

Leicester saw that he was expected to enter; but though bold, he was a cautious man, and for a moment held back with a hand upon his revolver.

"Step in—step in, sir," said the man, who still held the door; "the rain will wet you to the skin."

"Who wishes to see me?—what do you desire?"

said Leicester, with one foot on the steps. "I was informed that a lady wished to see me! Is she within the carriage?"

A faint exclamation broke from the carriage as the sound of his voice penetrated there.

"Step in, sir, at once, if you would be safe!" was the stern answer.

"I am always safe," was the haughty reply, and Leicester touched his side pocket significantly.

"You are safe here. Indeed, indeed you are!" cried a sweet and tremulous voice from the carriage. "In Heaven's name, step in, it is but a woman."

He was ashamed of the hesitation that might have been misunderstood for cowardice, and sprang into the vehicle. The door was instantly closed; another form sprang up through the darkness and placed itself by the driver. The carriage drove off at a rapid pace, for, drenched in that pitiless rain, both horses and driver were impatient to be housed for the night.

Within the carriage all was profound darkness. Leicester had placed himself in a corner of the back seat, he felt that some one was by his side shrinking back as if in terror or greatly agitated. It was a female, he knew that by the rustling of a silk dress—by the quick respiration—by the sort of thrill that seemed to agitate the being so mysteriously brought in contact with him. His own sensations were strange and inexplicable; accustomed to adventure and living in intrigue of one kind or another continually, he entered into this strange scene with absolute trepidation. The voice that had invited him into the carriage was so clear, so thrillingly plaintive, that it had stirred the very core of his heart like an old memory of youth, planted when that heart had not lost all feeling.

He rode on then in silence, disturbed as he had not been for many a day, and full of confused thought. His hearing seemed unusually acute. Notwithstanding the rain that beat noiselessly on the roof, the grinding wheels, and loud, splashing tread of the horses, he could hear the unequal breath of his companion with startling distinctness. Nay, it seemed to him as if the very beating of a heart all in tumult reached his ear also: but it was not so. That which he fancied had reached his ear was a powerful intuition knocking at his heart.

Leicester had not attempted to speak; his usual cool self-possession was lost. His audacious spirit seemed shamed down in that unknown presence. But this was not a state of things that could exist long with a man so bold and so unprincipled. After the carriage had dashed on perhaps ten minutes, he thought how singular this silence must appear, and became ashamed of it. Even in the darkness he smiled in self-derision; a lady had called at his hotel—had taken him almost per force into her carriage—was he to sit there like a great school-boy, without one gallant word or one effort to obtain a glimpse at the face of his captor? He almost laughed as this thought of his late awkward confusion presented itself. All his audacity returned, and with a tone of half jeering gallantry he drew closer to the lady.

"Sweet stranger," he said, "this seems a cold reception for your captive. If one consents to be taken

prisoner on a stormy night like this, surely he may expect at least a civil word."

He had drawn close to the lady, her hand was in his cold as ice. Her breath floated over his cheek, that too seemed chilly, but familiar as the breath of a flower beloved in childhood. There was something in the breath that brought that strange sensation to his heart again. He was silent, the gallant words seemed freezing in his heart. The hand clasped in his grew warmer, and began to tremble like a half-frozen bird taking warmth from the humane bosom that has given it shelter. Again he spoke, but the jeering tone had left his voice. He felt to his innermost soul that this was no common adventure, that the woman by his side had some deeper motive than idle romance or ephemeral passion for what she was doing.

"Lady," he said, in a tone harmonious with gentle respect, "at least tell me why I am thus summoned forth. Let me hear that voice again, though in this darkness to see your face is impossible. It seemed to me that your voice was familiar. Is it so? Have we ever met before?"

The lady turned her head, and it seemed that she made an effort to speak: but a low murmur only met his ear, followed by a sob as if she were gasping for words.

With the insidious tenderness which made this man so dangerous, he threw his arm gently around the strangely agitated woman, not in a way to arouse her apprehensions had she been the most fastidious being on earth, but respectfully as if he felt that she required support. She was trembling from head to foot. He uttered a few soothing words, and bending down kissed her forehead. Then her head fell upon his shoulder, and she burst into a passion of tears. Her being seemed shaken to its very centre; she murmured amid her tears soft words too low for him to hear. Her hand clung to his tighter and more passionately; she clung to him like a deserted child restored to its mother's bosom. Libertine, bad as he was, Leicester could not misunderstand the agitation that overwhelmed the stranger. It aroused all the sleeping romance—all the vivid imagination of his nature; unprincipled he was, but not without feeling. Surprise, gratified vanity, nay, some mysterious influence of which he was unaware, held the deep evil of his nature in abeyance. Strange as this woman's conduct had been, wild, incomprehensible as it certainly was, he could not think entirely ill of her. He would have laughed at another man in his place had he entertained a doubt of her utter worthlessness; but there she lay against his heart, and spite of that, spite of a nature always ready to see the dark side of human nature, he could not force himself to treat her with disrespect. After all there must have been some few sparks of goodness in that man's heart, or he could not so well have comprehended the bitter feelings of another.

She lay thus weeping and passive circled by his arm, her tears seemed very sweet and blissful. Now and then she drew a deep, tremulous sigh, but no words were uttered. At length he broke the spell that controlled her with a question.

"Will you not tell me now why you came for me,

and your name? If not that, say where we have ever met before?"

She released herself gently from his arm at these words, and drew back to a corner of the seat. He had aroused her from the sweetest bliss ever known to a human heart. This one moment of delusion was followed by a memory of who she was, and why she sought him, so bitter and sharp that it chilled her through and through. There was no danger that he could recognize her voice then, even if he had known it before. Nothing could be more faint and changed than the tone in which she answered—

"In a little time you shall know all."

He would have drawn her toward him again, but she resisted the effort with gentle decision; and completely lost in wonder he waited the course this strange adventure might take.

The horses stopped before some large building, but even the outline was lost in that inky darkness; something more gloomy and palpable than the air loomed before them, and that was all Leicester could distinguish. He sat still and waited.

The carriage door was opened on the side where the female sat, and some words passed between her and a person outside, but she leaned forward, and had her tones been louder they would have been drowned by the rain splashing over the carriage. The man to whom she had spoken closed the door and seemed to mount a flight of steps. Then followed the sound of an opening door, and after that a gleam of light now and then broke through a chink in that black mass, up and up, till far over head it gleamed through the blinds of a window, revealing the casement and nothing more.

Again the carriage door was opened. The lady arose and was lifted from the carriage. Leicester followed, and without a word they both went up the granite steps of a dwelling. The outer door stood open, and, taking his hand, she led him through the profound darkness of what appeared to be a spacious hall. Then they mounted a flight of stairs thickly carpeted, he marked that: and traversing a second hall began to ascend again. Still another flight of stairs, and Leicester found himself in a small chamber, furnished after a fashion common to country villages in New England, but so unusual in a large city that it made him start.

We need not describe this chamber, for it is the one with which the reader is already acquainted. The woman who now stood upon the faded carpet, over which the rain dripped from her cloak, had visited it once before that day.

One thing seemed strange and out of keeping. A small lamp that stood upon the bureau was of silver, graceful in form, and ornamented with a wreath of flowers chased in frosted silver, and raised from the surface after a fashion peculiar to the best artists in Europe. Leicester was a connoisseur in things of this kind, and his keen eye instantly detected the incongruity between this expensive article and the cheap adornments of the room.

"Some waiting-maid or governess," he thought, with a sensation of angry scorn, for Leicester was fastidious even in his vices. "Some waiting-maid

or governess who has borrowed the lamp from her mistress' drawing-table; faith! the affair is getting too ridiculous!"

When Leicester turned to look upon his companion, all the arrogant contempt which this thought had given to his face still remained there. But the lady could not have seen it distinctly; she had thrown off her cloak, and stood with her veil of black lace, so heavily embroidered that no feature could be recognized through it, grasped in her hand as if reluctant to fling it aside. She evidently trembled from head to foot: and even through the heavy folds of her veil he felt the thrilling intensity of the gaze she fixed upon him.

The look of scornful disappointment left his face; there was something imposing in the presence of this strange being that crushed his suspicions and his scorn at once. Enough of personal beauty was revealed in the superb proportions of her form to make him more anxious for a view of her face. He advanced toward her eagerly, but still throwing an expression of tender respect into his look and manner. They stood face to face, and she lifted her veil.

He started, and a look of bewilderment came upon his face. These features were familiar, so familiar that every nerve in his strong frame seemed to quiver under the partial recognition. She saw that he did not fully recognize her, and flinging away both shawl and bonnet, stood before him. He knew her then! You could see it by the look of keen surprise—by the color as it crept from his lips—by the ashy pallor of his cheek. It was not often that this strong man was taken by surprise. His self-possession was marvelous at all times; but now even the lady herself did not seem more profoundly agitated. She was the first to speak. Her voice was clear and full of sweetness.

"You know me, Edward?"

"Yes!" he said, after a brief struggle, and drawing a deep breath—"yes."

She looked at him: her large eyes grew misty with tenderness, and yet there was a proud reserve about her as if she waited for him to say more. She was keenly hurt that he answered her only with that brief yes.

"It is many years since we have met," she said, at length, and in a low voice.

"Yes, many years," was his cold reply; "I thought you dead."

"And mourned for me! Oh! Leicester, for the love of Heaven, say that I was mourned when you thought me dead!"

Leicester smiled—oh, that cruel smile! It pierced that proud woman's heart like the sting of a venomous insect, she seemed withered by its influence. He was gratified, gratified that his smile could still make that haughty being cower and tremble. He was rapidly gaining command over himself. Quick in his association of ideas, even while he was smiling he had begun to calculate. Selfish, haughty, cruel, with a heart fearful in the might of its passion, yet seldom gaining mastery over nerves that seemed spun from steel, even at this trying moment he could reason and plan. That power seldom left him. With all his evil might he was cautious. Now he resolved to learn more, and deal warily as he learned.

"And if I did mourn, of what avail was it, Adeline?" He uttered the name on purpose, knowing that, unless she were marvelously changed, it would stir her heart to yield more certain signs of his power. He was not mistaken. She moved a step toward him as he uttered the name in the sweet, olden tone that slept ever, ever in her heart. The tears swelled to her eyes—she half extended her arms.

Again he was pleased. The chain of his power had not been severed. Years might have rusted but not broken it—thus he calculated, for he could reason now before that beautiful, passionate being, coldly as a mathematician in his closet. The dismay of her first presence disappeared with the moment.

"Oh! had I but known it! Had I but dreamed that you cared for me in the least!" cried the poor lady, falling into one of the hard chairs, and drawing a hand across her eyes.

"What then, Adeline—what then?"

He took her hand in his: she lifted her eyes—oh! what a flood of mournful tenderness clouded them.

"What then, Edward?"

"Yes, what then? How would any knowledge of my feelings have affected your destiny?"

"How? Did I not love—worship—idolize? Oh! Heavens, how I did love you, Edward!"

Her hands were clasped passionately: a glorious light broke through the mist of her unshed tears.

"But you abandoned me!"

"Abandoned *you*—oh, Edward!"

"Well, we will not recriminate—let us leave the past for a moment. It has not been so pleasant that we should wish to dwell upon it."

"Pleasant! oh! what a bitter, bitter past it has been to me!"

"But the present. If you and I can talk of anything it must be of that. Where have you been so many years?"

"You know—you know—why ask the cruel question?" she answered.

"True, we were not to speak of the past."

"And yet it must be before we part," she said, gently, "else how can we understand the present?"

"True enough; perhaps it is as well to swallow the dose at once, as we may probably never meet again."

She cast upon him a wild, upbraiding look. The speech was intended to wound her, and it did—that man was not content with making victims, he loved to tease and torture them. He sat down in one of the maple chairs, and drew it nearer to her.

"Now," he said, "tell me all, your history since we parted—your motive for coming here."

She lifted her eyes to his and smiled with mournful bitterness; the task that she had imposed upon herself was a terrible one. She had resolved to open her heart, to tell the whole harrowing, mournful truth, but her courage died in his presence. She could not force her lips to speak all. He smiled; the torture that she was suffering pleased him—for, as I have said, he loved to play with his victims, and the anguish of shame which she endured had something novel and exciting in it. For some time he would not aid her even by a question, but he really wished to learn a
tion of her history, for during the last three years

he had lost all trace of her, and there might be something in the events of those three years to affect his interest. It was his policy, however, to appear ignorant of *all* that had transpired. But she was silent: her ideas seemed paralyzed. How many times she had fancied this meeting—with what eloquence she had pleaded to him—how plausible were the excuses that arose in her mind—and now where had they fled, the very power of speech seemed abandoning her. She almost longed for some taunting word, another cold sneer—at least they would have stung her into eloquence—but that dull, quiet silence chained up her faculties. She sat gazing on the floor, mute and pale; and he sat coldly regarding her.

At length the stillness grew irksome to him.

"I am waiting patiently, Adeline; waiting to hear why you abandoned your husband!"

She started: her eye kindled, and the fury blood flashed into her cheek.

"I did *not* abandon my husband. He left me!"

"For a journey, but for a journey!" was the calm reply.

"Yes, such journeys as you had taken before, and with a like motive, leaving me young, penniless, beset with temptation, tortured with jealousy. On that very journey you had a companion."

She looked at him as if eager even then, against her own positive knowledge, to hear a denial from him, but he only smiled, and murmured softly—

"Yes, yes, I remember. It was a pleasant journey."

"It drove me wild—I was not myself—suspicions, such suspicions haunted me. I thought—I believed, nay, believe now that you wished me to go—that you longed to get rid of me—that you even encouraged—I cannot frame words for the thought even now. He had sent you money, large sums—Edward, Edward, in the name of Heaven, tell me that it was not for this I was left alone in debt, helpless. Say that you did not yourself thrust me into that terrible temptation!"

She laid her hand upon his arm and grasped it hard; her eyes searched his to the soul. He smiled—her hand dropped—her countenance fell—and oh! such bitter disappointment broke through her voice.

"It has been the vulture preying on my heart ever since. A word would have torn it away, but you will not take the trouble even to deceive me. You smile, only smile!"

"I only smiled at the absurdity of your suspicion."

She looked up eagerly, but with unbelief in her face. She panted to believe him, but lacked the necessary faith.

"I asked *him* to deny this on his death-bed, and he could not!"

"Then he *is* dead," was the quick rejoinder. "He *is* dead!"

"Yes, he is dead," she answered, in a low voice.

"And the daughter, his heiress?"

"She too is dead!"

He longed to ask another question. His eyes absolutely gleamed with eagerness, but his self-control was wonderful. A direct question might expose the unutterable meanness of his hope. He must obtain what he panted to know by circuitous means.

"And you staid by him to the last?"

She turned upon him a sharp and penetrating look. He felt the whole force of her glance, and assumed an expression well calculated to deceive a much less excitable observer.

"I thought," he said, "that you had been living in retirement. It was a great satisfaction for me to know this."

"I did live in retirement, toiled for my own bread; by wrestling with poverty I strove to win back some portion of content."

"Yet you were with him when he died!"

"It was a mournful death-bed—he sent for me, and I went. Oh! it was a mournful death-bed!"

Tears rolled down her cheeks; she covered her face with both hands.

"I had been the governess of his daughter—her nurse in the last sickness."

"And you lived apart, alone—you and this daughter."

"She died in Florence, we were alone. She was sent home for burial."

"And to be a governess to this young lady you abandoned your own child—*only* to be governess. Can you say to me, Adeline, that it was only to be a governess to this young lady?" There was feeling in his voice, something of stern dignity—perhaps at the moment he did feel—she thought so, and it gave her hope.

She had not removed her hands, they still covered her face, and a faint murmur only broke through the fingers—oh! what cowards sin makes of us! That poor woman dared not tell the truth—she shrunk from uttering a positive falsehood, hence the cowardly murmur that stole from her pallid lips—the sickening shudder that ran through her frame.

"You do not answer," said the husband, for Leicester *was* her husband—"you do not answer."

She had gathered courage enough to utter the falsehood, and dropping her hands, she replied in a firm voice, disagreeably firm, for the lie cost her proud spirit a terrible effort, and she could not utter it naturally as he would have done.

"Yes, I can answer. It was to be the young lady's governess that I went—only to be her governess!—penniless, abandoned, what else could I do?"

He did not believe her. In his soul he knew that she was not speaking the truth; but there was something yet to learn, and in the end it might be policy to feign a belief which he could not feel.

"So after wasting youth and talent on his daughter; pining your beauty over her death-bed and his, this pitiful man could leave you to poverty and toil. Did he expect that I would receive you again after that suspicious desertion?"

"No, no. The wild thought was mine—you once loved me, Edward!"

The tears were swelling in her eyes again; few men could have resisted the look of those eyes, the sweet pleading of her voice—for the contrast with her usual imperious pride had something truly fascinating in it.

"You were very beautiful then," he said—"very beautiful."

"And Am I so much changed?" she answered, with a smile of touching sweetness.

In his secret heart he thought the splendid creature handsomer than ever. If the freshness of youth was gone, there was grace, maturity, intellect, everything requisite to the perfection of womanhood, in exchange for the one lost attraction. It was a part of Leicester's policy to please her until he had mastered all the facts of her position, so he spoke for once sincerely, and in the rich tones that he knew so well how to modulate, told how superbly her beauty had ripened with time. She blushed like a girl. He could feel even that her hand was glowing with the exquisite pleasure given by his praise. But he had a point to gain—all her loveliness was nothing to him, unless it could be made subservient to his interest. What was her present condition?—had she obtained wealth abroad?—or could she insanely fancy that he would receive her penniless? This was the point that he wished to arrive at, but so far she had evaded it as if unconsciously. He looked around the room, hoping to draw some conclusion by the objects it contained. The scrutiny was followed by a faint start of surprise; the hard carpet, the bureau, the bed, all were familiar. They had been the little "setting out" that his wife had received from her parents in New England. How came they there, so well kept, so neatly arranged in that high chamber? Was she a governess in some wealthy household, furnishing her own room with the humble articles that had once been their own household gods? He glanced at her dress. It was simple and entirely without ornament, that only strengthened the conclusion to which he was fast arriving. He remembered the soft carpets over which they had tread, the caution used in admitting him to the house. The hackney-coach, everything gave proof that she would be an encumbrance to him. She saw that his eyes were bent on the patch-work quilt that covered the bed, the tears began to fall from her eyes.

"Do you remember, Edward, we used it first when our darling was a baby? Have you ever seen her since—since?"

He dropped her hand and stood up. His whole manner changed.

"Do not mention her, wretched, unnatural mother—is she not impoverished, abandoned? Can you make atonement for this?"

"No, no, I never hoped it, I feel keenly as you can how impossible it is. Oh, that I had the power!"

These words were enough, he had arrived at the certainty that she was penniless.

"Now let this scene have an end. It can do no good for us to meet again, or to dwell upon things that are unchangeable. You have sought this interview, and it is over. It must never be repeated."

She started up and gazed at him in wild surprise.

"You do not mean it," she faltered, making an effort to smile away her terror—"your looks but a moment since—your words. You have not so trifled with me, Edward—Edward!"

He was gone—she followed him to the door—her voice died away—she staggered back with a faint wail, and fell senseless across the bed.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1817, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 218.

CHAPTER VII.

There was not about her birth-place
A thicket, or a flower,
But childish game, or friendly face,
Had given it a power,
To haunt her in her after life,
And be to her again,
A sweet and bitter memory,
Of mingled joy and pain.

It was a wild and lovely spot in the heart of Maine, a state where the rural and the picturesque are more beautifully blended than can be found elsewhere upon the face of the earth. The portion we speak of, is broken, and torn up, as it were, by undulating ridges of the white mountains, that seem to cast their huge shadows half over the state. The valleys are bright with a wreath of foliage, which, in the brief summer time, is of a deeper and richer green, than ever was found elsewhere. The hills, some of them bold and black with naked rocks, others clothed down the side with soft waving ridges of cultivation, where oats, rye, and Indian corn, with the buckwheat, all in a sea of snowy blossoms, and fields newly ploughed for the next year's crop, are blended in one luxuriance of colors. Wild, deep lakes sleeping in their green basins among the hills; mountain streams plunging downward, and threading the black rocks together as with a thousand diamond chains of closely entangled fern struggling to get free. The placid river—the Androscoggen, gliding calmly on, winding through the hills, and rolling softly beneath the willows that here and there give its banks a park-like beauty, and a thousand broken hollows, sheltering nooks of cultivated ground, sometimes a single farm, sometimes a small village. Such is the country, and such are the scenes to which our story tends.

In one spot the mountainous banks loomed close and dark over the river, but there was a considerable depth of rich soil among the rocks, and thrifty trees crowded the poverty-stricken yellow pine up to the very summits of each beautiful acclivity—for half a mile the shadows of this rough bank had fallen nearly across the river, but all at once it parted as if some earthquake had torn it, centuries before, and there lay a little valley opening upon the river, and walled on one hand by an abrupt precipice, and on the other by a steep and broken hill, its crevices choked up by wild grape-vines, mosses and every species of forest tree that can be found among the high grounds of Maine. This little valley was perhaps the fourth of a mile in width, and cut back into the mountains twice

that distance. From thence the highway wound up the broken bank, and was lost sight of among the pine trees bristling along the horizon.

The river was broad at this point, as a rich plot of groves and meadow land lay on the opposite side. This was threaded by a turnpike connected with the road we have mentioned, by a ferry boat, or rather ancient scow, in which three or four old men of the neighborhood picked up a tolerable subsistence.

A few weeks after the events already related in the course of our story, a plain, one horse chaise came slowly along the highway, and bent its course toward the ferry. The scow had been hauled up beneath a clump of willows, and two old men sat in the shade waiting for customers. They saw the chaise and instantly sprang to work, rowing the scow out into the stream, and bringing it up with a clumsy sweep against the carriage track.

The chaise contained two persons, one was a female, in a neat unostentatious travelling dress, and with her face partially concealed by a green veil. The old men had never travelled far beyond the river which afforded them support, but there was something in the air and general appearance of the lady, which aroused them to an unusual degree of curiosity. The man too, there was much in his air and dress to attract observation; a mingling of rustic awkwardness, with self-confidence, and a sort of rude strength, that, while there was something in it, struck the old men as unnatural and foreign. The chaise they soon recognized as belonging to the landlord in a neighboring village, but the two persons who rode in it, puzzled them exceedingly. The man in the chaise drove at once into the scow, and stepping out he took his horse by the bit.

"Now move on!" he said, addressing the old men with the air of one who understood the place and its customs. "If the horse stands steady, I will lend a hand directly."

"Oh, he's steady enough, we've rowed the critter across here more than once, he ain't shirey, that horse ain't," answered one of the men, ready to open a conversation on any subject.

"Perhaps not, but I'll hold him just now and see how he stands the water."

There was nothing in this to open a fresh vein of conversation, so, taking up their poles, the two old men pushed their lumbering craft into the river, casting now and then a furtive glance at the lady, who had drawn her veil aside, and sat with her eyes fixed

the opposite shore, apparently unmindful of their scrutiny.

"Purty, ain't she?" whispered one of the men.

The other nodded his head.

"A sort of na'tral look about her," continued the man, drawing back as if to give a fresh plunge with his pole.

"Just so!" was the rejoinder.

The lady who had, up to this time, kept her eyes eagerly bent on the little village to which they seemed creeping over the water, suddenly addressed them—

"There are three houses in the valley now, that nearest the water, to whom does it belong?"

"That ma'am! oh that's the new tavern, the sign isn't so well seen when the leaves are out, but yit if you look close, its swinging to that ar willow agin the house."

The lady cast a glance toward the willow, and then her eyes seemed to pierce into the depths of the valley. Beyond the tavern lay an apple orchard, and back of that rose the roof of an old gray house, the ridge and heavy stone chimney alone were visible; but the old building seemed to fascinate her gaze—she bent forward, her hands were clasped, her features grew visibly pale. She cast a wild, earnest look at the old man, and attempted to speak, but the effort only made her parted lips turn a shade whiter. She uttered no sound.

"You needn't be afraid, marm, there's no arthly danger here!" said one of the men, mistaking the source of her emotion. "I've been on this ferry sixteen years, and no accident has ever happened in my time. You could 'nt drown here if you was to try."

The lady looked at him with a faint quivering smile, that died gently away as her gaze became more earnest. She dwelt upon his withered old face, as if trying to study in its hard lines for some familiar feature.

"Sixteen years!" she said, and the smile returned, but with an additional tinge of sadness, "sixteen years!"

"It seems a long time to you, like enough, but you seez, marm, wait till you get as old as I am, and see how short it is."

The lady did not reply, but sinking back into her seat, drew the veil over her face.

All this time, the traveller, who still held the horse by the bit, had been regarding the lady with no ordinary appearance of anxiety. He overheard the whispers passing between the ferrymen, and seemed annoyed by their import. He was evidently ill at ease. When the scow ran with a grating noise upon the shore, he gave the usual fare in silence, and entering the chaise with a swing leap, drove toward the tavern.

The landlord, a thin, looking man, who had just arisen from an early supper, washed down by a cup of hard cider, came indolently from the front stoop, and held the horse while the travellers dismounted.

"Want to bate the horse?" he inquired, pointing toward a rough wooden trough built against the huge trunk of the willow.

"Put him up—we shall stay all night," replied the guest.

The landlord's face expanded; it was not often his house was honored by travellers of a higher grade than the farmer teamsters, who brought private fare for man and horse in the same bag; which usually contained oats or corn in one end, and a box of baked beans, a loaf of bread, and a wedge of dried beef in the other—man and beast dividing accommodations equally on the journey.

"Oats or grass?" cried the good man, excited by the rich prospects before him.

"Both, with two rooms, supper for, the lady in her own chamber, for me, anywhere."

"Supper!" cried the landlord, with a crest-fallen look, "supper!" We havn't a morsel of fresh meat, nor a chicken on the place."

"But there is trout in the brook, I suppose," answered the traveller.

"Yes, but—but how did you know that? been in these parts afore mebbly."

"These hills are full of trout streams, everybody knows that, who ever heard of the state," was the courteous reply. "If you have a pole and line handy, perhaps I can help you."

"There is one in the porch, I'll just turn out the horse, and show you the way."

The traveller seemed glad to be relieved from observation. He turned hurriedly away, and taking a rude fishing rod from the porch, went round the house, and crossing a meadow behind it, came out upon the banks of a mountain stream, that marked the precipitous bounderies of the valley. A wild, sparkling brook it was—broken up by rocks sinking into deep, placid pools, and leaping away through the witch hazles and brake leaves that overhung it with a soft, gushing murmur so sweet and cheerful, that it seemed like the sunshine laughing, as it was drawn away to the hill shadows.

Jacob Strong looked up and down the stream with a sad countenance. "How natural everything seems," he muttered. "She used to sit here on this very stone, with her little fish pole, and—and those pretty white feet half in the water, and I—how she would laugh at my awkward way of baiting her hook—she didn't know what made my hand tremble, no, nor never will!"

Jacob sat down upon the stone on which his eyes had been riveted. With his face resting between his hands, an elbow supported by each knee, and his feet buried in a hollow choked up with wood moss, he fell into one of those profound reveries, that twine every fibre of the heart around the past. The fishing rod lay at his feet, unheeded. Just beneath his eye, was a deep pool, translucent as the diamond, and sleeping at the bottom, lay three or four fine trout, floating upon their fins, and with their matted sides now and then gleaming through the water with a soft rainbow flash.

At another time Jacob, who had been a famous angler in his day—would have been excited by this fine prospect of sport, but now these delicate creatures, balancing themselves in the waves, scarcely won a passing notice. They only served to remind him more vividly of the long ago.

He was aroused by the landlord, who came up the

stream, pole in hand, baiting his hook as he walked along. He cast two fine trout, strung upon a forked hazle twig, on the moss at Jacob's feet, and dropped his hook into the pool.

Jacob watched him with singular interest. His eyes gleamed as he saw the man pull his fly with a calm, steady hand over the surface of the water, now dropping it softly down, now aiding it to float lazily on the surface, then allowing it to sink insidiously before the graceful creatures that it had as yet failed to excite. All at once, a noble trout, that had been sleeping beneath a tuft of grass, over which the water flowed, darted into the pool with a swiftness that left a ripple behind him, and leaped to the fly. Jacob almost uttered a groan, as he saw the beautiful creature lifted from the wave, his fins quivering, his jeweled sides glistening with water drops, and every wild evolution full of groanful agony. He was drawing a parallel between the tortured trout and a human being, whose history filled his heart. This it was that wrung the groan from his heart.

"This will do!" said the landlord, gently patting the damp sides of his prize, and thrusting the hazle twig under his gills. "You're sartin of a supper, sir, and a good one too—they'll be hissing on the grid-iron long before you get to the house, I reckon, without you make up your mind to go along with me."

"Not yet; I will try my luck further up the stream," answered Jacob, and snatching up the rod, he plunged through a clump of elders, and disappeared on the opposite bank. But the man was scarcely out of sight when he returned again and resumed his old position. Again he fell into thought—deep and painful thought. You could see it in the quiver of his rude features, in the film-like silk that gathered over his eyes.

The afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen across the valley, but they only served to plunge poor Jacob into memories still more bitter and profound. Everything within sight seemed clamoring to him of the past. Near him was a clover-field, ruddy with blossoms, and broken with clumps and ridges of golden butter-cups and *swamp lilies*. It brought a little girl to his remembrance—a fair, sweet child with chestnut curls and large, earnest eyes, who had waited in a corner of the fence, while he gathered armsful of these field blossoms, for her to toss about in the sunshine. On the other hand lay an apple orchard, with half a dozen tall pear trees, ranging along the fence. He remembered climbing those trees a hundred times up to the very top, where the pears were most golden in their ripeness. He could almost hear the rich fruit as it went tumbling and rustling through the leaves, down to the snow-white apron held up to receive it. That ringing shout of laughter, as the apron gave way beneath its luscious burden—it rang through his heart again, and made a child of him.

The shadows grew deeper upon the valley, dew began to fall, and each soft gush of air that swept over the fields became more and more fragrant. Still Jacob dwelt with the past. The lady at the inn was forgotten. He was roaming amid those sweet scenes with a wild, mischievous, beautiful girl, when a hand fell upon his shoulder. He started up and began to tremble as if caught in some deep offence.

"Madam, oh, madam, what brought you here?" "I could not stay in that new house, Jacob. The air of this valley penetrates my very heart. It was so close I could not weep in there."

Jacob turned his head away, he could not all at once arouse himself from the deep delirium of his memories; his strong brain ached with the sudden transition her presence had forced upon it.

"Where are you going, madam, not up yonder—not to the old house?"

"I must go, Jacob, this suspense is choking me, I could not live another hour without learning something of them."

"No, not yet, I beg of you, do not go yet."

Adeline Leicester turned abruptly toward her humble friend, her lips grew very pale.

"Why, why? have you inquired? have you heard anything?"

"No, I did not like to ask questions at first."

"Then you know absolutely nothing?"

"Nothing yet!"

"But you have seen the old house. It should be visible from this hollow!"

"Not now, madam. The orchard has grown round since—since—"

"Have the saplings grown into trees since then, Jacob? Indeed it seems but like yesterday to me," said the lady, with a sad wave of the hand. "I thought to get a view of the house from this spot; just as one ponders over the seal of a letter, afraid to read the news within. Let me sit down, I feel tired and faint."

Jacob moved back from the stone, and tears absolutely came into his eyes as she sat down.

"How strangely familiar everything is," said the lady, looking around, "this tuft of white flowers close by the stone. It scarcely seems to have been out of blossom since I was here last, I remember. But why have you crushed them with your feet, Jacob?"

"Because I remember!" answered the man, removing his heavy foot from the bruised flowers, and regarding them with a stern curve of the lip, which on his irregular mouth was strongly impressive. The lady raised her eyes, filled with vague wonder, to his features. Jacob was troubled by that questioning glance.

"I never loved flowers," he said, hesitatingly.

"You never loved flowers. Oh, my good friend, how can you say so?"

"Not that kind, at any rate, marm," answered Jacob, almost vehemently, pointing down with his finger. "The last time I came this way, a snake was creeping round among those very flowers. That snake left poison on everything it touched, at least in this valley."

The lady gazed on his excited face a moment very earnestly. Then the broad, white lids drooped over her eyes, and she only answered with a profound sigh.

The look of humble repentance that fell upon Jacob's face, was painful to behold. He stood uneasily upon his feet, gazing ruefully down upon the tuft of flowers his passion had trampled to the earth. His large hands, with their loosely knit joints, became

nervously restless, and he cast furtive glances at the face and downcast features of the lady. He could not speak, but waited for her to address him again, in his heart of hearts sorry for the painful thoughts his words had aroused. At length he ventured to speak, and the humble, deprecating tones of his voice were absolutely musical with feeling.

"The dews are falling, marin, and you are not used to sitting in the damp."

"There was a time," said the lady, "when a little night dew would not drive me in doors."

"But now you are tired and hungry."

"No, Jacob, I can neither taste food, nor take rest, till we have been yonder, perhaps not then, for Heaven only knows what tidings may reach us. Go in and get some supper for yourself, my good friend."

Jacob shook his head.

"True, I am wrong," persisted the lady, "let me sit here till the dusk comes on, then I will find my way to the house, perhaps I may sleep there to-night, Jacob, who knows?" She paused a moment and added, "if they are alive, but surely I need not say if. They must be alive."

"I hope so," answered Jacob, pitying the wistful look, with which the poor lady searched his features, hoping to gather confidence from their expression.

"And yet my heart is so heavy. Leave me now, Jacob, I must have time to think."

Jacob turned away, without a word of remonstrance. His own rude, honest heart was full, and the sickening anxiety manifest in every tone and look of his mistress, was fast undermining his own manhood. He did not return to the tavern, however, but clambering over a fence, leaped into the clover field, and wading, knee deep, through the fragrant blossoms, made his way toward the old farm-house, whose chimney, and low, sloping roof, became more and more visible with each step.

On he went, with huge rapid strides, resolute to carry back some tidings to the unhappy woman he had just left. "I will see them first," he muttered, "they might not know her, or might have heard. It ain't likely though, who could bring such news into these parts. Anyhow, I will see that nothing is done to hurt her feelings."

Full of these thoughts, Jacob drew nearer and nearer to the old house. He crossed the clover lot, and a fine meadow, whose thick, waving grass, was still too green for the scythe, lay before him, bathed in the last rays of a mid-summer sunset. Beyond this meadow rose the farm house, silent and picturesque in the waning day, with gleams of golden light here and there breaking over the mossed old roof. Jacob paused with his hand upon an upper rail of the fence. His heart misgave him. Every object was so painfully familiar, that he shrunk from approaching nearer. There was the garden sloping away from the old dwelling, with a line of cherry trees running along the fence, and shadowing triple rows of currant and gooseberry bushes, now bent to the ground with a load of crimson and purple fruit. There was the well sweep, with its long round bucket, swinging to the breeze, and the pear tree standing by, like an ancient sentinel staunch at his post, and verdant in its thrifty

old age. A stone or two had fallen from the rough chimney, and on the sloping fall of the roof lay a greenish tinge, betraying the velvety growth of moss with which time had dotted the decayed shingles.

Silent and solemnly quiet stood that old dwelling amid the dying light which filled the valley. A few jetty birds were fluttering in and out of a martin-box at one end, and that was all the sign of life that appeared to the strained eyes of Jacob Strong. He stood, minute after minute, waiting for a sight of some other living object—a horse grazing at the back door—a human being approaching the well, anything alive would have given relief to his full heart. He could contain himself no longer: a desperate wish to learn at once all that could give joy or pain to his mistress possessed him. He sprang into the meadow, found a path trodden through the grass, and sweeping the tall, golden lilies aside, where they fell over the narrow way, he strode eagerly forward, and soon found himself in a garden. It was full of coarse vegetables, and gay with sun-flowers, tufts of "love-lies-bleeding," drooped around the gate, and flowering beans, tangled with morning glories, half clothed the worm-eaten fence.

Coarse and despised as some of these flowers are, how eloquently they spoke to the heart of Jacob Strong! The very sun-flowers, as they turned their great dials to the West, seemed to him redolent and golden with the light of other days. They filled his heart with new hope; since the earliest hour of his remembrance those mossy blossoms had never been wanting at the old homestead.

Again the objects became more and more familiar. The plantain leaves about the well seemed to have kept their greenness for years. The grindstone, with a trough half full of water, stood in its old place by the back porch. Surely while such things remained, the human beings that had lived and breathed in that lone dwelling, could not be entirely swept away!

Jacob Strong entered the porch and knocked gently at the door. A voice from within bade him enter, and, lifting the latch, he stood in a long, low kitchen, where two men, a woman, and a chubby little girl, sat at supper. One of the men, a stout, sun-burned fellow, arose, and placing a splint bottomed chair for his guest, quietly resumed his place at the table, while the child sat with a spoon half way to its mouth, gazing with eyes full of wonder at the strange man.

Jacob stood awkwardly gazing on the group. A chill of keen disappointment fell upon him. Of the four persons seated around that table, no one face was familiar. He sat down and looked around the room. A single tallow candle standing on the table shed its faint light on those around, but failed to reveal the troubled look that fell upon the visitor. The silence that he maintained seemed to astonish the family. The farmer turned restlessly in his chair, and at last opened a discourse after his own hospitable fashion.

"Sit by and take a bite of supper," he said, while his wife arose and went to a corner cupboard.

"No, I thank you," answered Jacob, with an effort, for the words seemed blocking up his throat.

"You had better sit by!" observed the wife, modestly, coming from the cupboard with a plate and

knife in her hands. There's nothing very inviting, but you'll be welcome."

"Thank you," said Jacob, rising, "I'm not hungry; but if you've got a cup handy, I will get a drink at the well."

The farmer took a white earthen bowl from the table, and, reaching forward, handed it to his guest.

"And welcome, but you'll find the well pole rather hard to pull, I calculate!"

Jacob took the bowl and went out. It seemed to him that a draught from that moss-covered bucket would drive away the chill that had fallen on his heart at the sight of those strange faces. He sat the bowl down among the plaitain leaves, and seizing the pole plunged the old bucket deep into the well. When it came up again, full and dripping, he balanced it on the curb and drank. After this, he lingered a brief time by the well, filled with disappointment, and striving to compose his thoughts. At length he entered the house again with more calm and fixed resolution.

"This seems to be a fine place of yours," he said, taking the chair once more offered to his acceptance, and addressing the farmer. "That was as pretty a meadow I just crossed as one might wish to see!"

"Yes, there is some good land between this and the brook," answered the man, pleased with these commendations of his property.

"You keep it in good order too; such timothy I have not seen these five years."

"Wal, true enough, one may call that grass a little mite superior to the common run, I do think!" answered the farmer, taking his chubby little daughter on one knee, and smoothing her thick hair with both his hard palms, "and considering how the old place was run down when we took it, we haven't got much to be ashamed of, anyhow."

"You have not always owned the farm?" Jacob's voice shook as he asked the question, but the farmer was busy caressing his child, and only observed the import of his words, not the tone in which they were uttered.

"I rayther think you must be a stranger in these parts, for everbody knows how long I've been upon the place; nigh upon ten years, isn't it, Mabel?"

"Ten years last spring," replied the woman, in a pleasant, low tone; "jist three years before Lucy was born."

"That's it! she's as good as an almanac at dates; could beat a hull class of us boys at cyphering when we went to school together, couldn't you, Mabel?"

The wife answered with a blush, and a good-humored smile divided cordially between her husband and Jacob.

"You must not think us over shiftless," she said, "for living in the old house so long, we've talked of building every year, but somehow the right time hasn't come yet; besides Joshua don't exactly like to tear the old house down."

"Tear it down," cried Jacob, with a degree of feeling that surprised the worthy couple—"tear the old homestead down; don't do it—don't do it, friend. There live those in the world who would give a piece of gold for every shingle on the roof rather than see a beam loosened."

"I guess you must have been in this neighborhood afore this," said the farmer, looking at his wife with shrewd surprise; "know something about the old homestead, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Yes, I passed through here many years ago; a man at that time, older than you are now, lived on the place; his name was—let me think——"

"Wilcox, was that the name?"

"Yes, that was it—a tall man, with dark eyes."

"That's the man, poor old fellow; why we bought the farm of him."

"I wonder he ever brought himself to part with it! His wife seemed so fond of the place, and—his daughter: he had a daughter, if I recollect right?"

"Yes, we heard so; I never saw her; but the folks around here talk about her wild, bright ways, and her beauty to this day; a harnsome, smart gal she was if what they say can be relied on."

"But what become of her? Did she settle anywhere in these parts?"

"Wal, no, ? reckon not. A young fellow from somewhere about Bosting or York, come up the river one summer to hunt and fish in the hills, he married the gal and carried her off to the city."

"And did she never come back?"

"No; but a year or two after, the young man come and brought a little girl with him, the purtyest creature you ever sat eyes on. Hard words passed between him and the old man, for Wilcox wouldn't let any human being breathe a whisper agin his daughter. Nobody ever knew exactly what happened, but the young man went away and left his child with the old people. It wasn't long after this before the old man kinder seemed to give up, he and his wife too, jist as if that bright little grandchild had brought a canker into the house. After that things went wrong, nothing on earth could make the old people neighborly, they gin up going to meeting, and sat all Sunday long on the hearth there looking into the fire. Wal, you know the best of us will talk when anything happens that is not quite understood. Some said one thing, and some another, and Wilcox arter while got so shy of his neighbors that they took a sort of distaste to him."

"Did the old people live alone after their daughter went away?" asked Jacob, in a husky voice. "There was a young man or boy in the family when I knew anything about it."

"Oh, yes, I jist remember, there was a young chap that Mr. Wilcox brought up—a clever critter as ever lived. He went away just arter the gal was married, and nobody ever knew what became of him. People thought the old man pined about that too: at any rate, one thing or another broke him down, and his wife with him."

"You do not mean to say that Mr. Wilcox and his wife are dead?"

The farmer turned his eyes suddenly on the form of Jacob Strong, as these words were uttered, for there was something in the tone that made his honest heart ache. Jacob sat before him like a criminal, pale, shrinking in his chair.

"No, I did not mean to say that they died, but when a tough, cheerful man, like Wilcox, gives up, it is worse than death."

"What happened then—where did he go? is the child living?" almost shouted Jacob Strong, unable to control the agony of his impatience a moment longer; but the astonished look of his auditors checked the burst of impetuous feeling, and he continued more quietly—

"I took an interest in this family long ago, and stopped in the valley over-night, on purpose to visit the old gentleman. I had no idea he would ever leave the farm, and was surprised to find strangers here, more so than you could have been at seeing me. Tell me now where the Wilcox family can be found?"

"That is more, by half, than I know myself," answered the farmer. "I bought the farm, paid cash down for everything, land, stock, furniture, and all."

"But where did they go?" cried Jacob, breathless with suspense.

"To Portland, they took one wagon load of things, and when the teamster came back, he said they were left in a hold of a schooner lying at the wharf."

"But where was she bound—what was her name?"

"That was exactly what we asked the teamster, but he could tell nothing about it, and from that day to this, no person in these parts has ever heard a word about them!"

Jacob arose and supported himself with his chair.

"And is this all? Gone, no one knows where? Is this all?"

"All that I or any one else can tell you," answered the kind-hearted farmer.

"But the teamster, where is he?"

"Dead!"

Jacob left the house without another word. He knew that these tidings would be more terrible to another than they had been to him, and yet that seemed scarcely possible, for all the rude strength of his nature seemed prostrated by the news that he heard.

The twilight had given place to a full moon, and all

the valley lay flooded in a sea of light. The meadows were full of fire-flies, and a whip-poor-will on the mountain side, poured a mournful noise upon the air. Jacob could not endure the thought of meeting his friend and mistress, with tidings that he knew would rend her heart. He left the homstead, tortured by all that he had heard, and plunged into a pretty hollow which opened to the trout stream. In this hollow stood a tall, elm tree with great, sweeping branches, that drooped almost to the ground. A spring of never-failing water gushed out from a rocky bank, which it shaded, and the sweet gurgle of its wavelets as they flowed away through the cowslips and blue flag that choked up the outlet to the mountain streams, fell like the memory of an old love upon his senses. He drew near the elm, and there sitting upon the fragment of rock, with her head resting against the rugged trunk of the elm, sat Adeline Leicester. Her face shone white in the moonbeams, and Jacob could hear her sobs, long before she was conscious of his approach.

She heard his step at length, and starting to her feet, came out into the full light. The hand with which she wildly searched his, was damp and cold, and he could see that heavy tear-drops were trembling on her cheek.

"Were they there—are they alive, I saw you go in, and have been waiting all this time? Tell me, Jacob, will they let me sleep in the old house to-night?"

"They are all gone, no one of the whole family are there!" answered Jacob Strong, too much excited for ordinary prudence.

A wild cry—scarcely louder than the scream of a bird—but oh, how full of agony, rang down the valley, and terror-stricken at what he had done, Jacob saw his mistress lying at his feet, her pale face, her lifeless hands, and the white shawl which she had flung about her, huddled together in the pale moonlight.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1849, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42.

CHAPTER VIII.

OVERLOOKING one of those small parks or squares that lies in the heart of our city like tufts of wild flowers in a desert, stands one of those miniature palaces too small for the very wealthy, too beautiful in its appointments for any idea but that of perfect taste which wealth does not always give. A cottage house it was, or rather an exquisite mockery of what one sees named as cottages in the country. The front of a pale stone color; was so ornamented and netted over with the lace-work of iron balconies and window-gratings, that it had all the elegance of a city mansion, with much of the rustic beauty one sees in a rural dwelling. A little court, full of flowers, lay in front, with a miniature fountain throwing up a slender column of water from the centre of a tiny grass-plot, that, in the pure dampness always raining over it, lay like a mass of crushed emeralds hidden among the flowers. The netted iron work that hung around the doors, the windows, and fringed the eaves, as it were, with a valance of massive lace, was luxuriously interwoven with creeping plants. *Prairie* roses, crimson and white, clung around the lower balconies. *Ipomaeas* wove a profusion of their great purple and rosy bells around the upper windows; cypress vines, with their small crimson bells; *petunias* of every tint; rich passion flowers, and *verbenas* with their leaves hidden in the tiny balconies, wove and twined themselves with the coarser vines, blossoming each in its turn, and filling the leaves with their gorgeous tints. Crimson and fragrant honey-suckles twined in massive wreaths up to the very roof, where they grew and twined and blossomed in the lattice work, now in masses, now spreading out like an embroidery, and everywhere loading the atmosphere with fragrance. The cool, bell-like dropping of the fountain, that always kept the flowers fresh; the fragrance of half a dozen orange trees, snowy with blossoms and golden with heavy fruit; the gleam of white lilies; the glow of roses, and the graceful sway of a slender *laburnum* tree, all crowded into one little nook scarcely large enough for the pleasure-grounds of a fairy, were enough to draw general attention to the house, though another and still more beautiful object had never presented itself at the window.

On a moonlight evening, especially when a sort of pearly veil fell upon the little flower nook, an air of quiet beauty impossible to describe rested around this

dwelling—beauty not the less striking that it was so still, so lost in profound repose, that the house might have been deemed uninhabited but for the gleam of light that occasionally broke through the vines about one or another of the windows. Sometimes it might be seen struggling through the roses around the lower balcony, but far oftener it came in faint gleams from a window in the upper story, and at such times the shadow of a person stooping over a book, or lost in deep thought, might be seen through the muslin curtains. No sashes, flung open in the carelessness of domestic enjoyment, were ever seen in the dwelling; no voices of happy childhood were ever heard to ring through those clustering vines. Sometimes a young female would steal timidly out upon the balconies, and return again like a bird afraid to be detected in the door of its cage. Sometimes an old lady in mourning might be seen passing in and out, as if occupied with some slight household responsibility. This was all the neighborhood ever knew of the cottage or its inmates. The face of the younger female, though always beautiful, was not always the same, but no one knew when one disappeared and another took her place.

The cottage had been built by a private gentleman, and its first occupant was the old lady. She might have been his mother, his tenant, or his housekeeper, no one could decide her exact position. He seldom visited the house. Sometimes during months together he never crossed the threshold. But the old lady was always there, scarcely ever without a young and lovely companion: and what seemed most singular, year after year passed and her mourning garments were never changed.

Servants, the universal channel through which domestic gossip circulates in the basement strata of social life, were never seen in the cottage. An old colored woman came two or three times a week and performed certain household duties, but she spoke only in a foreign language, and probably had been selected for that very reason. Thus all the usual avenues of intelligence were closed around the cottage. True, a colored man came occasionally to prune and trim the little flower nook, but he was never seen to enter the house, and appeared to be profoundly ignorant of its history and its inmates. Some of the most curious had ventured far enough into the fairy garden to read the name on a silver plate within the latticed entrance. It was a single name, and seemed to be foreign; at any rate, it had

no familiar sound to those who read it, and whether it belonged to the owner of the cottage or the old lady still continued a mystery. Thus the cottage remained a tiny palace, more isolated amid the surrounding dwellings than it could have been even buried in the green depths of the country, up to the season when our story commences; then the profound quietude of the place was broken by the appearance of a new inmate. A fair young girl about this time was often noticed early in the morning, and sometimes after dusk hovering about the little fountain, as if enticed there by the scent of the orange trees; still, though her white garments were often seen fluttering amid the shrubbery, which she seemed to haunt with the shy timidity of a wild bird, few persons ever obtained a distinct view of her features.

On the night, and at the very hour when Adeline Leicester and Jacob Strong met beneath the old elm tree in sight of the farm-house which had once sheltered them, two men gently approached this cottage and paused before the gate. This was nothing singular, for it was no unusual thing, when that lovely fountain was tossing its cool shower of water-drops into the air, and the flowers were bathed in the moonlight; for persons to pause in their evening walk and wonder at the gem-like beauty of the place. But these two persons seemed about to enter the little gate. One held the latch in his hand, and appeared to hesitate only while he examined the windows of the dwelling. The other younger by far and more enthusiastic, grasped the iron railing with one hand, while he leaned over and inhaled the rich fragrance of the flower-garden with every appearance of exquisite gratification.

"Come," said Leicester, gently opening the gate, "I see a light in the lower rooms—let us go in!"

"What, here? Is it here you are taking me?" cried the youth, in accents of joyful surprise—"how beautiful—how very, very beautiful. It must be some queen of the fairies you are leading me to see!"

"You like the house then?" said Leicester, in his usual calm voice, gently advancing along the walk. "It does look well just now with the moonlight falling through the leaves, but these things become tiresome after awhile!"

"Tiresome!" exclaimed the youth, casting his glance around. "Tiresome!"

"I much doubt," added Leicester, turning as he spoke, and gliding as if unconsciously along the little snow white gravel walk that curved around the fountain—"I much doubt if anything continues to give entire satisfaction, even the efforts of our own mind, the work of our own hands after it is once completed. It is the progress, the love of change, the curiosity to see how this touch will effect the whole, that gives zest to enjoyment in these things. I can fancy the owner of this faultless little place now becoming weary of its prettiness."

"Weary of a place like this—why the angels might think themselves at home in it?"

"They would find out their mistake, I fancy!" As Leicester uttered these words the moonlight lay full upon his face, and the worm-like curl of his lip which the light revealed, had something fearfully repulsive

in it. The youth happened to look up at the moment, and a sharp revulsion came over his feelings. For the moment he fell into thought, and when he spoke the change in his spirit was very evident.

"I can imagine nothing that is not pure and good, almost as the angels themselves living here!" he said, half timidly, as if he feared the scoff that might follow his words.

"We shall see," answered Leicester, breaking a cluster of orange flowers from one of the plants. He was about to fasten the fragrant sprig in his button-hole, but some after thought came over him, such as often regulated his most trivial actions, and he gave the branch to his companion. "Put it in your bosom," he said, with a sort of jeering good humor, as one trifles with a child: "who knows but it may win your first conquest."

The youth took the blossoms, but held them carelessly in his hand. There was something in Leicester's tone that wounded his self-love; and without reply he moved from the fountain. They entered the richly latticed park, and Leicester touched the bell knob.

The door was opened by a quiet, pale old lady, who gravely bent her head as she recognized Leicester. After one glance of surprise at his young companion, which certainly had no pleasure blended with it, she led the way into a small parlor.

Nothing could be more exquisitely chaste than that little room. The ceilings and the enameled walls were spotless as crusted snow, and like snow was the light cornice of grape-leaves and fruit, that scarcely seemed to touch the ceiling around which they were entwined. No glittering chandelier, no gilded cornices or gorgeous carpets disturbed the pure harmony of this little room; delicate India matting covered the floor; the chairs, divans and couches were of pure white enamel. Curtains of soft, delicate lace, embroidered, as it were, with snow-flakes, draped the sashes. Those at the bay window which opened on the flower-garden, were held apart by two small statues of Parian marble that stood guarding the tiny alcove, half veiled in clouds of transparent lace.

Upon a massive table of pure alabaster, inlaid with softly clouded agate, stood a Grecian vase, in which a lamp was burning, and through its sculpture poured a subdued light that seemed but a more lustrous kindling of the moonbeams that lay around the dwelling.

The youth had not expressed himself amiss: it did seem as if an angel might have mistaken this dwelling, so chaste, so spotlessly cool, for his permanent home. The clouds of Heaven did not seem more free from earthly taint than everything in this dwelling. Robert paused at the threshold, a vague feeling of self-distrust came over him. It seemed as if his presence would soil the mysterious purity of the room. The old lady with her grave face and black garments was so at variance with the place, that the very sight of her moving so noiselessly across the room chilled him to the heart.

Leicester sat down on a divan near the window.

"Tell Florence I am here!" he said, addressing the old lady.

For a moment the lady hesitated, then without having spoken a word she went out. Directly there

a faint rustling sound on the stairs: a quick, light footstep near the door, and with every appearance of eager haste a young girl entered the room. A morning dress of white muslin, edged with a profusion of delicate lace, clad her slender form from head to foot; a tiny cameo of blood red coral fastened the robe at her throat, and this was all the ornament visible upon her person.

She entered the room in breathless haste, her dark eyes sparkling, her cheeks warm with a rich crimson, thus with both hands extended she approached Leicester, but before she reached the divan the consciousness that a stranger was present fell upon her. She paused, her hands fell, and all the beautiful gladness faded on her countenance.

"A young friend of mine," said Leicester, with an indolent wave of the hand toward Robert. "The evening was so fine we have been rambling in the park, and being near dropped in to rest awhile."

The young lady turned with a very slight inclination, and Robert saw the face he had so admired in Leicester's chamber, the beautiful, living original of a picture that still was engraven on his heart. The surprise was overpowering. He could not speak; and Leicester, who loved to study the human heart in its tumults, smiled softly as he marked the change upon his features.

As if overcome by the presence of a stranger, the young lady sat down near the divan which Leicester occupied. The color had left her cheek; and Robert, who was gazing earnestly upon her, thought that he could see tears gathering in her eyes.

"It is a long time since you have been here," she said, in a low voice, bending with a timid air toward Leicester. "I—I—that is, we began to think you had forgotten us."

"No, I have been very busy, that is all!" answered Leicester, carelessly. "I sent once or twice some books and things—did you get them?"

"Yes; thank you very much—but for them I should have been more sad than, than——" She checked herself in obedience to the quick glance that he cast upon her; but, spite of herself, the sound of rising tears was in her voice: the poor girl seemed completely broken down with some sudden disappointment.

"And your lessons, Florence, how do you get along with them?"

"I cannot study," answered the girl, shaking her head mournfully. "Indeed I cannot, I am so, so——"

"Homesick!" said Leicester, quietly interrupting her. "Is that it?"

"Homesick!" repeated the girl, with a faint shudder. "No, I shall never be that!"

"Well—well, you must learn to apply yourself," rejoined Leicester, with an affectation of paternal interest; "we must have a good report of your progress to transmit when your father writes."

Florence turned very white, and, hastily rising, lifted the lace drapery, and concealing herself in the recess behind, seemed to be gazing out upon the flower-garden. A faint sound now and then broke from the recess; and Robert, who keenly watched every movement, fancied that she must be weeping.

Leicester arose, and sauntering to the window, glided behind the lace. A few smothered words were uttered in what Robert thought to be a tone of suppressed reproof, and then he came into the room again, making some careless observation about the beauty of the night. Florence followed directly, and took her old seat with a drooping and downcast air, that filled the youth with vague compassion.

"Now that we are upon this subject," said Leicester, quietly resuming the conversation, "you should, above all things, attend to your drawing, my dear young lady. I know it is difficult to obtain really competent masters; but here is my young friend who has practiced much, and has decided genius in the arts, he will be delighted to give you a lesson now and then."

Florence lifted her eyes suddenly to the face of the youth. She saw him start and change countenance, as if from some vivid emotion. A faint glow tinged her own cheek, and, as it were, obeying the glance of Leicester's eye, which she felt without seeing, she murmured some gentle words of acknowledgment.

"I shall be most happy," said the poor youth, blushing, and all in a glow of joyous embarrassment—"that is if I thought—if I dreamed that my imperfect knowledge—that any little talent of mine could be of service."

"Of course it will!" said Leicester, quietly interrupting him; "do you not see that Miss Nelson is delighted with the arrangement? I was sure that it must give her pleasure!"

Florence turned her dark eyes on the speaker with a look of gratitude that might have warmed a heart of marble.

"Ah, how kind you are to think of me thus!" she said, in a low tone, that, sweet as it was, sent a painful thrill through the listener. "I was afraid that you had forgotten those things that I desire most."

"It is always the way with very young ladies, they are sure to think a guardian too exacting, or too negligent," said Leicester, with a smile.

Again Florence raised her eyes to his face with a look of vague astonishment; she seemed utterly at a loss to comprehend him, and though a faint smile fluttered on her lip, she seemed ready to burst into tears.

You should have seen Leicester's face as he watched the mutations of that beautiful countenance. It was like that of an epicure who loves to shake his wine, and amuse himself with its rich sparkle long after his appetite is satiated. It seemed as if he were striving to see how near he could drive that young creature to a passion of tears, and yet forbid them flowing.

"Now," he said, turning upon her one of his most brilliant smiles—"now let us have some music. You must not send us away without that, pretty lady; run up and get your guitar."

"It is here," said Florence, starting up with a brightened look. "At least I think so—was it not in this room I played for you last?"

"And have you not used the poor instrument since?" questioned Leicester, as she brought a richly inlaid guitar from the window recess.

"I had no spirits for music," she answered softly, as he bent over the ottoman on which she seated

herself, and with an air of graceful gallantry threw the broad riband over her neck.

"But you have the spirits now," he whispered.

A glance of sudden delight and a vivid blush was her only reply, unless the wild, sweet burst of music that rose from the strings of her guitar might be deemed an answer.

"What will you have?" she said, turning her radiant face toward him, while her small hand glided over the strings after this brilliant prelude. "What shall it be?"

It was a fiendish pleasure, that of torturing a young heart so full of deep emotions; but the pleasures of that man were all fiendish, the cold refinement of his intellect made him cruel. With his mind he tortured the soul over which that mind had gained ascendancy. He named the song very gently which that poor young creature was to sing. It was her father's favorite air. The last time she had played it—oh! with what a pang she remembered that time. It sent the color from her lips. Her hand seemed turning to marble on the strings. This was what Leicester expected. He loved to see the hot, passionate flashes of a heart all his own thus frozen by a word from his lip, or a glance of his eye. A moment before she had been radiant with happiness—now she sat before him drooping and pale as a broken lily. That was enough. He would send the fire to her cheek again.

"No, let me think, there was a pretty little air you sometimes gave us on shipboard—do you remember I wrote some lines for it? Let me try and catch the air."

He began to hum over a note or two, as if trying to catch an almost forgotten air, regarding her all the while through his half closed eyes. But even the mention of that song did not quite arouse her; it is easier to give pain than pleasure; easier to dash the cup of joy from a trembling hand than to fill it afterward. She sighed deeply, and sat with her eyes bent upon the floor. That bad man was half offended. He looked upon her continued depression as an evidence of his waning power, and was not content unless the heart-strings of his victim answered to every glowing or icy touch of his own evil spirit.

"Ah, you have forgotten the air, I expected it?" he said, in a tone of thrilling reproach, but so subdued that it only reached the ear for which it was intended, but he had stricken that young heart deep. Even this but partially aroused her. His vicious pride was pained. He leaned back on the divan, and the words of a song sparkling, passionate and tender with love broke from his lips. His voice was superb; his features lighted up; his dark eyes flashed like diamonds beneath the half closed lashes.

You should have seen Florence Leicester then. That voice flowed upon her chilled heart like dew upon a perishing lily, like sunshine upon a rose that the storm has shaken; her drooping form became more erect; her hand began to tremble; her pale lips were softly parted, and grew red as if the warm breath flashing through kindled a richer glow with each short, eager gasp: deeper and deeper those mellow notes penetrated her soul; for the time her very being was given up to the wild delusion that had perverted it.

All the time that his spirit seemed pouring forth its tender memories he was watching the effect, coldly as the physician counts the pulse of his patient. She was very beautiful as the bloom came softly back to her cheek like a smile growing vivid there—it was like watching a flower blossom, or the escape of sunbeams from underneath a summer cloud. He loved a study like this, it gratified his morbid taste, it gave him mental excitement, and what yielded a keener relish was the tribute to his inordinate vanity. A doubt that his hitherto invincible powers of attraction might fall away with the approach of age, began to haunt him about this time, and the thought stimulated his hungry self-love into more intense action. He was testing his own powers in the beautiful agitation of that young creature. The rich vibrations of his voice were still trembling upon the air when the old lady returned to the room. Her manner was still quiet, but her large and very black eyes were brighter than they had been, and her tread, though still, was more firm as she crossed the room. She advanced directly toward Leicester, whose back was partly turned toward her, and touched his shoulder.

"Edward!"

Leicester started from his half reclining position and sat upright; the song was hushed the instant that low, but ringing voice fell upon his ear, and, with some slight display of embarrassment, he looked in the old lady's face. Its profound gravity seemed to chill even his audacity.

"Not here, Edward—you know I do not like music!" added the old lady, in her firm, gentle tones.

Florence leaned back in her seat and drew a deep breath. It seemed as if she had been disturbed in the sweet bewilderment of some dream; Robert was gazing fixedly upon her, wondering at all he saw. To him she appeared like the birds he had read of fluttering around the jaws of a serpent; spite of himself this delusion would come upon him. Yet he had boundless faith in the honor and goodness of the man on whom her eyes were fixed, and to him she was a profound stranger.

"I did not know—indeed, madam, I thought you liked music!" said Florence, casting the riband from her neck, and addressing the old lady.

"Only when we are alone, then I love to hear you sing and play both, dear child; but Edward—Mr. Leicester's voice. It is that I do not like."

"Not like *his* voice?" exclaimed Florence, turning her eyes upon him with a look that made Robert press his lips hard together—"not like that—oh, madam?"

"Well—well, madam, you shall not be annoyed by it again," said Leicester, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "I forgot myself, that is all!"

The old lady bent her head and sat down, but her coming cast a restraint upon the little group, and though she attempted to open a conversation with Robert, he was too much pre-occupied for anything more than a few vague replies to that which she said.

From the moment of her entrance Leicester changed his whole demeanor. He joined in the effort she was making to draw the youth out, and that with a degree of quiet gravity that seemed by its respect to win upon her favor. He took no further notice of Florence, and

seemed unconscious that she was sitting near watching this change with anxious eyes and drooping spirits.

"I have," said Leicester, after a few common place remarks, "I have just been proposing that the young gentleman should give our pretty guest here some drawing lessons during the season, always under your sanction, madam, of course."

The old lady cast a more searching glance at the youth than she had hitherto bestowed on him, and then bending her eyes upon the floor, she seemed to ponder over the proposal that had been made. After this her keen glance was directed to Leicester, and then she seemed lost in thought again.

"Yes," she said, at length, looking full and hard at Leicester, "it will occupy her—it will be a benefit, perhaps, to both."

Leicester simply bent his head: he conquered even the expression of his face, that the keen eyes bent upon him might not detect the hidden motive which urged this proposal. That there was some motive the old lady well knew, but she resolved to watch closer. His projects were not to be fathomed in a moment. She did not leave the room again, and her presence threw a constraint upon each individual there, which prompted the visitors to depart.

Florence arose as they prepared to go out. Her dark eyes were beseechingly turned upon Leicester. As if with a mute glance she sought to keep him a few minutes longer, though she had no courage to utter the wish. He took her soft, little hand gently in his, held it a moment and went away, followed by Robert and the old lady, who accompanied her guests to the door.

Florence had crept into the window recess, and while her panting breath clouded the glass, gazed wistfully at these two dark shadows as they glided through the flower-garden. She was keenly disappointed; this visit, the one great joy for which she had so waited and watched was over, and how had it passed? With the keen, cold eyes of that old lady upon them—beneath the curious scrutiny of a stranger. Tears of vexation gathered in her eyes; she heard the old lady return, and tried to crush them back with a pressure of the silken lashes, shivering still behind the cloud of lace that her too visible discomposure might not be detected. The old lady entered the room, and, believing it empty, sat down in a large, easy chair. She sighed profoundly, shaded her face with one of the thin, delicate hands that still bore an impress of great beauty. Her eyes were thus shrouded, and, though she did not appear to be weeping, one deep sigh after another heaved the black neckerchief folded over her bosom. As these sighs abated, Florence saw that the old lady was sinking into a reverie so deep, that the young creature fancied she might steal away, unnoticed, to her room. So timidly creeping out from the drapery that in its cloud-like softness fell back without a rustle, she moved noiselessly toward the door. The old lady looked suddenly up, and the startled girl could see that the usual serious composure of her countenance was greatly disturbed.

"Ah, is it you, my dear?" she said, in her usual kindly tones. "I thought you had gone up stairs."

Florence was started by the suddenness of this address and turned back, for there was something in the old lady's look that seemed to desire her stay.

"No," she said, "I was looking out—upon—the night. It is very lovely!"

"Paradise was more lovely, and yet serpents crept among the flowers, even there!" said the old lady, thoughtfully.

A vivid blush came into Florence's pale cheek.

"I—I do not understand you," she said, in a faltering voice.

"No, I think not—I hope not!" answered the lady, bending her eyes compassionately on the young girl, "come here and sit by me."

Florence sat down upon the light ottoman which the old lady drew near her chair. The blushes a moment before, warm upon her cheeks, had burned themselves out. She felt herself growing calm and sad under the influence of those serious, but kind eyes.

"You love Mr. Leicester!" This was uttered quietly, and rather as an assertion than from any desire for a reply. As she spoke, the old lady pressed her hand upon the coil of raven hair that bound that graceful head, the motion was almost a caress, and it went to the young creature's heart. "Has he ever said that he loved you?"

"Loved me, oh! yes, a thousand times," cried the young creature, her eyes and her cheek kindling again, "else how could you know—how could any one guess how very, very much I think of him?"

"And how do you expect this to end?" questioned the old lady, while a deeper shade settled on her pale brow.

"End!" repeated Florence, and her face was bathed with blushes to the very temples; "I have never really thought of that—he loves me!"

"Have you never doubted that?" questioned the old lady, with a faint wave of the head.

"What, his love? I—I—how could any one possibly doubt?"

"And yet to-night—this very evening?"

"No—no, it was only disappointment—regret, the—the flurry of his sudden visit—not doubt—oh, not doubt of his love!"

"Has this man—has Leicester ever spoken to you of marriage? Have his professions of love ever taken this form?" persisted the old lady, becoming more and more earnest.

"Of marriage, yes—no—not in words."

"Not in words then?"

"No, I never thought of that before—but what then?"

"Then," said the old lady, impressively—"then he is one shade less of a villain than I had feared!"

"Madam!" exclaimed the young girl, all pallid and gasping with anger and affright.

"My child," said the old lady, taking both those small, trembling hands in hers, "Edward Leicester will never marry you, nor any one."

"How do you know, madam? how can you know? Who are you that tell me this with so much authority?"

"I am his mother, poor child. God help me, I am his mother!"

The young girl sat gazing up into that aged face, so pale, so still, that her very quietude was more painful than a burst of passion could have been.

"His mother!" broke from her parted lips. "It is his mother who calls him a villain!"

"Even so," said the old lady, with mournful intensity. "Look up, girl, and see what it costs a mother to say these things of an only son?"

Florence did look up, and when she saw the anguish upon that face usually so calm, her heart filled with tenderness and pity notwithstanding the tumult already there, and taking the old lady's hands in hers, she bent down and kissed them.

"You are indeed his mother?" she said, with a sort of fond anguish. "To-morrow you will unsay these bitter words—you are only angry with him now—something has gone wrong." You will not repeat such things of him to-morrow—for oh! they have made me wretched."

"I am cruel only that I may be kind!" said the old lady, with mournful earnestness. "And now, dear child, let us talk no more, you are grieved, and I suffer more than you think." With these words, the old lady arose and led her guest from the room.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1849, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 78.

CHAPTER IX.

AMID all the varieties of architecture—Grecian, Gothic, Swiss, Chinese, and even Egyptian, to be met with on Long Island, there yet may be found some genuine old farm house, with barns instead of carriage houses, and cow stables in the place of pony stables. To these old houses are still attached the generous garden hedged in with its picket fence, and teeming with vegetables, the front yards full of old fashioned shrubbery, with thick grass half a century old mowing it over. These things, primitive and full of the olden times, are not yet all crowded out of sight by sloping lawns, gravel walks, and newly acclimated flowers. If they do not so vividly appeal to the taste, those, who have hearts, sometimes feel them softened by these relics of the past, to warmer and sweeter feelings than mere fancy ever aroused.

In one of these old houses, a low roofed, unpretending dwelling, exhibiting unmistakable evidence of what had once been white paint on the edges of its clap-boards, and crowned by a huge stone chimney, whose generous throat seemed half choked up with swallow's nests, might have been found some of the personages of our story.

I have said it was autumn—but a generous, balmy autumn, that seemed to cajol and flatter the summer into keeping it company close up to the Christmas time. True, the gorgeous tints of a late Indian summer lay richly among the trees, but still some patches of bright green were still left, defying the season, and putting aside, from day to day, the red and golden veil which the frost was constantly endeavoring to cast over them.

In front of the old house stood two maples—noble trees, such as have had no time to root themselves around your modern colleges. These maples, symmetrical as a pair of huge pine cones, rose against the house a perfect cloud of gorgeous foliage. One red as blood, and with a dash of the most vivid green still keeping its hold down the centre of each leaf—the other golden all over, as if its roots were nourished in the metallic soil of California, and its leaves dusted by the winds that drift up gold in the valley of Sacramento—blended and wove these ripe leaves together, now throwing out a wave of red, now a mass of gold, and here a tinge of green in superb confusion.

All around, under these maples, the grass was littered with a fantastic carpet of leaves, showered down from the branches. They hung around the huge

old lilac bushes. They fluttered down to the rose thickets, and lay in patches of torn crimson and crumpled gold among the house-licks and mosses on the roof.

In and out, through this shower of ripe leaves, fluttered the swallows. In and out, along the heavy branches, darted a pair of striped squirrels, who owned a nest in a hollow of the oldest and most stately tree. In and out, through the long, low kitchen, the parlor, the pantries, and the milk-room, went and come our old friend, the comely huckster woman of Fulton Market. The house was hers. That great square garden sloping down from the back door was hers. How comfortable and harvest-like it lay dropping down toward the South, divided into sections, crowded with parsnips, beets, onions, potatoes, raspberry thickets, and strawberry patches, in short, running over with the luxuries of the stock in trade that had furnished her market stall during the year. The season was late. The frost had been there nipping, biting and pinching up the noble growth of vegetables that was to supply Mrs. Gray's stall. Half the great white onions lay above ground, with their silvery coats exposed. The beet beds were of a deep blackish crimson; and the cucumber vines had yielded up their last delicate fruits. All her neighbors had gathered in their crops days ago, but the good lady only laughed and chuckled over the example thus offered for her imitation. The New England barn, accustomed to the sharp east winds of Maine, cared nothing for the petty frosts that only made the leaves of her beet and parsnip beds gorgeous white, while the precious bulbs lay softly bedded in the soil. No matter what others did, she never gathered her garden crop till Thanksgiving. That was her harvest time, her great yearly jubilee—the season when her accounts were reckoned up—her barns and cellars running over with the wealth of her little farm. Christmas, New Year, the Fourth of July, in short, all the holidays of the year were crowded into one with Mrs. Gray. During the whole twelve months, she commemorated Thanksgiving only. The reader must not, for a moment, suppose that the Thanksgiving Mrs. Gray loved to honor, was the miserable counterfeit of a holiday proclaimed by the governor of New York. No! Mrs. Gray scorned this poor attempt at imitation. It made her double chin quiver only to think of it. If ever a look of contempt crept into those benevolent eyes, it was when people would try to convince her that any governor, out of New England, could enter

into the spirit of a regular down East Thanksgiving; or, that any woman, south of old Connecticut, could be educated into the culinary mysteries of a mince pie. Her faith was boundless, her benevolence great, but in these things Mrs. Gray could not force herself to believe.

You should have seen the old lady as Thanksgiving week drew near—the governor's day—that solemnly proclaimed by the governor of Maine. Mrs. Gray heeded no other. That week, the woman of a neighboring stall took charge of Mrs. Gray's business. The customers were served by a strange hand; the brightness of her comely face was confined to her own roof tree. She gave thanks to God for the bounties of the earth, heartily, earnestly, but it was her pleasure to render these thanks after the fashion of her ancestors. You should have seen her then, surrounded by raisins, black currants, pumpkin sauce, peeled apples, sugar boxes, and plates of golden butter, her plump hand pearly with flour dust, the whole kitchen redolent with ginger, allspice and cloves. You should have seen her grating orange peel and nutmegs, her snow white cap just from the laundress, and the soft gray hair underneath, tucked hurriedly back of the ear on one side, where it had threatened to be in the way.

You should have seen her in that large splint-bottomed rocking-chair, with a wooden bowl in her capacious lap, and a sharp chopping knife in her right hand, with what a soft, easy motion the chopping knife fell! with what a quiet and smiling air the dear old lady would take up a quantity of the powdered beef on the flat of her knife, and observe as it showered softly down to the tray again, that "meat chopped *too* fine for mince pies was sure poison." Then the laugh—the quiet, mellow chuckle with which she regarded the astonished look of the Irish girl, who could not understand the mystery of this ancient saying.

Yes, you should have seen Mrs. Gray at this very time, in order to appreciate fully the perfections of an old-fashioned, New England housewife. They are departing from the land. Railroads and steamboats are sweeping them away. In a little time, providing this humble tale is not first sent to oblivion, this very description will have the dignity of an antique subject. Women who cook their own dinners and take care of the work hands, are getting to be legendary even now.

The day came at last, bland as the smile of a warm heart, a breath of summer seemed whispering with the over-ripe leaves. The sunshine was of that warm golden yellow that belongs to the autumn. A few fall flowers glowed in the front yard, richly tinted dahlias, marigolds, chrysanthums, and china asters, with the richest and most velvety amaranths, still kept their bloom, for those huge old maples sheltered them like a tent, and flowers always blossomed later in that house than elsewhere. No wonder! Inside and out, all was pleasant and genial. The fall flowers seemed to thrive upon Mrs. Gray's smiles. The rosy countenance as she overlooked them, seemed to warm up their leaves like a sunbeam. Everything grew and brightened about her. Everything combined to make this particular Thanksgiving one to be remembered.

Now, all was in fine progress, nothing bad gone wrong, not even the awkward Irish girl, for she had only to see that the potatoes were in readiness, and for that department she was exquisitely qualified. Mrs. Gray had done wonders that morning. The dinner was in a most hopeful state of preparation. The grist, red cased, imperious looking turkey, that had strutted away his brief life in the barn-yard, was now snugly bestowed in the oven—Mrs. Gray had not yet degenerated down to a cooking-stove—his heavy coat of feathers scattered to the wind. His head, that arrogant, crimson head, that had so often awed the whole poultry yard, lay all unheeded in the dust, close by the horse block. There he sat, the poor denuded monarch—turned up in a dripping pan, sunning himself brown in the kitchen oven. Never, in all his pomp, had that bosom been so warmed and distended—yet the huge turkey had been the sole gormound in his time. A rich thymey odor broke through every pore of his body; streams of luscious gravy dripped down his sides, filling the oven with an unctuous stream that penetrated a crevice of the door, and made the poor Irish girl cross herself devoutly; she felt her spirit so yearning after the good things of earth, and never having seen Thanksgiving set down in the calendar, was shy of surrendering her heart to a holiday that had no saint to patronize it.

No wonder, the odor that stole so insidiously to her nostrils was appetising. The turkey had plenty of companionship in the oven. A noble chicken pie flanked his dripping pan on the right; a delicate sucking pig was drawn up to the left wing; in the rear towered a mountain of roast beef, while the mouth of the oven was choked up with a generous Indian pudding. It was an ovenful worthy of New England, worthy of the day.

The hours were creeping when guests might be expected. Mrs. Gray, who had been invisible a short time after filling the oven, appeared in the little parlor perfectly redolent with good humor and a fresh toilet. A cap of the most delicate material, to which white satin ribands gave a silvery brightness, cast a transparent brightness over her bland and pleasant features. A dress of black silk, heavy and ample in the skirt, rustled around her portly figure as she walked. Folds of the finest muslin lay upon her bosom, in chaste contrast with the black dress, and just revealing a string of gold beads which had reposed for years beneath the caressing protection of her double chin.

Mrs. Gray was ready for company, and tried her best to remain with proper dignity in the great rocking chair that she had drawn to a window commanding a long stretch of the road; but every few moments she would start up, bustle across the room, and charge Kitty, the Irish girl, to be careful and watch the oven, to keep a sharp eye on the sauce-pans in the fire-place, and, above all, to have the mince pies within the range of the fire, that they might receive a gradual and gentle warmth by the time they were wanted. Then she would return to the room, arrange the branches of asparagus that hung laden with red berries over the looking glass, or dust the spotless table with her handkerchief, just to keep herself busy, as she said. At last she heard the distant sound of a

wagon, turning down the cross road toward the house. She knew the tramp of her own old market horse even at that distance, and seated herself by the window ready to receive the guests she expected, with becoming dignity.

The little one horse wagon came down the road with a sort of dash quite honorable to the occasion. Mrs. Gray's hired man was beginning to enter into the spirit of a holiday; and the old horse himself made everything rattle again, he was so eager to reach home, the moment it hove in sight.

The wagon drew up by the door yard gate with a flourish worthy of the third avenue. The hired man sprang out, and with some show of awkward gallantry, lifted a young girl in a pretty pink calico and a cottage bonnet, down from the front seat. Mrs. Gray could maintain her position no longer; for the young girl glanced that way with a look so eloquent, a smile so bright, that it warmed the dear old lady's heart like a flash of fire in the winter time. She started up, hastily shook loose the folds of her dress, and went out, rustling all the way like a tree in autumn.

"You are welcome, dear, welcome as green peas in June, or radishes in March," she cried, seizing the little gloved hand held toward her, and kissing the Heavenly young face.

The girl turned with a bright look the brighter beams—tears stood in her eyes, and making a graceful little wave of the hand toward an aged man who was tenderly helping a female from the wagon, seemed about to speak.

"I understand, dear, I know all about it! the good old people—grandpa and grandma, of course. How could I help knowing them?" Mrs. Gray went up to the old people as she spoke with a bland welcome in every feature of her face.

"Know them, of course I do!" she said, enfolding the old gentleman's hand with her plump fingers. "I—I—gracious goodness, now, it really does seem as if I had seen that face somewhere!" she added, hesitating, and with her eyes fixed doubtfully on the stranger, as if she were calling up some vague remembrance, "strange, now isn't it? but he looks natural as life."

The old man turned a warming glance toward his wife, and then answered, with a grave smile, "that, at any rate, Mrs. Gray could never be a stranger to them, she who had done so much——"

She interrupted him with one of her mellow laughs. Thanks for a kind act always made the good woman feel awkward, and she blushed like a girl. "No, no, but somehow I can't give it up: this isn't the first time we have seen each other!"

"I hope that it will not be the last!" said old Mrs. Warren, coming gently forward to her husband's assistance. "Julia has seen you so often, and talked of you so much—no wonder we seem like old acquaintances. I always thought Julia looked very much like her grandfather!"

"Yes, I reckon it must be that," answered Mrs. Gray, evidently but half giving up her prepossession. "Her face isn't one to leave the mind: I dreamed about it the first night after she came into the market poor thing—poor thing!"

Mrs. Gray repeated the last words with great tenderness, for Julia Warren had crept close to her, and taking one of her hands, softly lifted it to her lips.

"Come, come, let us go in," cried the good woman, gently withdrawing her hand, with which she patted Julia on the shoulder. "There, there, pick your grandmother a handful of china asters. I believe the frost left them just for you."

Julia was about to obey the welcome command, but her glance happened to fall on the face of her grandfather, and she hesitated. There was something troubled in his look, an expression of anxiety that struck her as remarkable.

"Grandpa, what is the matter? you look pale!" she said, in a low voice, for with delicate tact, she saw he wished to escape observation.

"Nothing, child, nothing," he answered hurriedly, but with kindness. "Do not mind me."

Julia cast one more anxious look into his face, and then stooped to the flowers. The old gentleman followed Mrs. Gray and his wife into the house.

"A sweet, pretty creature, isn't she?" said Mrs. Gray, watching Julia from the parlor window, after she had put aside Mrs. Warren's things, "and handsome as a picture! Just watch her now as she turns her face this way."

"Ah, you are kind to praise her," said Mrs. Warren, with a gentle smile, "you know how much it pleases us."

Mrs. Gray laughed, and shook her head. "I know how much it pleases me, and that's all I think about it," she answered, and the two warm, noble-hearted women stood together, watching Julia as she gathered and arranged her humble bouquet.

The child did indeed look very lovely in her pink dress—only a shilling calico, but fresh and beaming for all that. You never saw anything more interesting in your life, for the long ringlets of her hair swept from underneath her bonnet, with its delicate rose-colored tinge; and the ride had given her cheek a bloom fresh as an almond flower when it first opens; still she was a slender, fragile, little creature, and you saw that the rude winds of life had swept too early over her. Feeling and intellect had prematurely developed in her nature. In her face—in her smile—in her eyes, with their beautiful curling lashes, there was something painfully spiritual. Within the last few months, this expression had grown upon her wonderfully, her loveliness was of a kind to make you thoughtful, sometimes even sad. Mrs. Gray felt all this without understanding it, and her heart yearned strongly toward the child.

"It's a truth," she said, addressing the grandmother, "I feel almost as if she were my own daughter, and yet I never had a child, and didn't use to care for other people's children much. I really believe that some day I shall up and give her these. It's come into my mind more than once, I can tell you—and yet they were my mother's, and her mother's before that." Here Mrs. Gray ran her fingers along the gold beads on her neck. "It's strange, but I always want to be giving her something."

"You are always giving her something," said Mrs. Warren, gratefully.

"No, no, nothing to speak of."

"That pretty dress and the bonnet—are they nothing?"

"And who told you that?—who told you they came from me?"

"We have not so many friends that there could be much doubt," answered Mrs. Warren, with a gentle sigh. "Julia was sure of it from the first; and the other things?" continued the old lady, in a low voice, glancing at her own neat dress, "who else would have thought of them?"

All truly generous persons shrink from spoken thanks. The gratitude expressed by looks and actions may give pleasure, but there is something too material in words, they display all the refinement of a benevolent action. Good Mrs. Gray felt this the more sensitively, because her own words had seemed to challenge the thanks of her guest. The color came into her smooth cheek, and she began to arrange the folds of her dress with both hands, exhibiting a degree of awkwardness quite unusual to her. While lifting her eyes again they fell upon a young man coming down the cross road on foot, with an eager and buoyant step.

"There he comes, I thought he would not be long on the way," she cried, while a flash of goodness radiated her face. "Is my nephew, you see him there, Mrs. Warren—no, the maple branch is in the way! Here he is again—now look! a noble fellow, isn't he?"

Mrs. Warren looked, and was indeed struck by the free air and superior appearance of the youth. He had evidently walked some distance, for a light over-sack hung across his arm, and his face was flushed with exercise. Seeing his aunt, the boy waved his hand; his lips parted in a joyous smile, and he hastened his pace almost to a run.

Mrs. Gray's little brown eyes glistened, but she could not turn them from the youth, even while addressing her guest.

"Isn't he handsome?—not like your girl, but handsome for a boy," she exclaimed, with fond enthusiasm, "and good—you have no idea, ma'am, how good he is. There, that is just like him, the wild creature!" she continued, as the youth laid one hand upon the door-yard fence and vaulted over, "right into my flower-beds, trampling over the grass there—did you ever?"

"Couldn't help it, Aunt Sarah," shouted the youth, with a careless laugh, "I'm in a hurry to get home, and the gate is too far off. Three kisses for every flower I tramp down—will that do? Ha, what little lady is this?"

The last exclamation was drawn forth by Julia Warren, who had seated herself at the root of the largest maple, and with her lap full of flowers, was arranging them into bouquets. On hearing Robert's voice she looked up with a glance of pleasant surprise, and a smile broke over her lips. There was something so rosy and joyous in his face, and in the tones of his voice, that it rippled through her heart as if a bird had just broken into song overhead. The youth looked upon her for a moment with his bright, gleeful eyes, then, throwing off his hat and sweeping

back the damp chestnut curls from his forehead, he sat down by her side, and cast a glance full of laughing defiance at his relative.

"Come out here and get the kisses, Aunt Sarah, I have made up my mind to stay among the flowers!"

Mrs. Gray laughed at the young rogue's impudence, as she called it, and came out to meet him.

"Now this is too bad," exclaimed the youth, starting up; "don't box my ears, aunt, and besides paying the kisses, I will embrace you dutifully—upon my life I will—that is if my arms are long enough," and with every appearance of honest affection the youth cast one arm around the portly person of his aunt, and pressed a warm kiss on her cheek.

"You are welcome home, Robert, always welcome; and I wish you a happy Thanksgiving with my whole heart. Julia dear, this is my nephew, Mr. Robert Otis. His mother and I were sisters—only sisters; there were three of us in all, two daughters and a son. He is the only child among us, that is the reason I spoil him so."

Julia, who had just recovered from the blush that had crimsoned her cheek at his first approach, came forward and gave her hand to the youth with a timid and gentle grace, that seemed too composed for her years.

"And Miss Julia Warren, who is she, dear aunt?" questioned the youth, in a half whisper, as the girl moved toward the house, holding the loose flowers to her bosom with one hand.

"The dearest and best little girl that ever lived, Robert: that is all I know about her!" was the earnest reply.

"And enough, who wants to know more of any one," returned the youth; "and yet Mr. Leicester would say that something else is wanting before we invite strangers to eat Thanksgiving dinners with us. He would say that all this is imprudent."

"Mr. Leicester is very wise, I dare say, and I am but a simple old woman, Robert; but somehow that which seems right for me to do always turns out for the best."

"Because what seems right to the good always is best, my darling old aunt. I only wanted to prove how prudent and wise a city life has made me."

"Prudent and wise—don't set up for the character, Bob. These things never did run in our family, and never will. Just content yourself with being good and as happy as you can!"

All at once Robert became grave. Some serious thought seemed pressing upon his mind.

"I always was happy when you were my only adviser," he said, looking in her face with a thoughtful sort of gloom.

"Now don't, Robert, don't joke with your old aunt. One would think by your looks that there was something in it. I'm sure it would break my heart to think you unhappy in earnest!"

"I know it would!" answered the affectionate youth, casting aside his momentary depression. "Just box my ears for teasing you, and let us go in—I must help the little girl tie up her flowers."

Mrs. Gray seemed about to press the conversation a little more earnestly; but that moment the Irish girl

came through the front door with an expression of solemn import in her face. She whispered in a flustered manner to her mistress, and the words "spoiled entirely," reached Robert's ear.

Away went the aunt all in a state of excitement to the kitchen. The nephew watched her depart, and then turning thoughtfully back, began to pace up and down the footpath leading from the front door to the gate. The first wild flash of spirits consequent on a return home had left him, and from that time the joyousness of his look grew dim. He was gay only by starts, and at times fell into thought that seemed unnatural to his youth, and his usual merry spirit.

Whatever mischief had happened in the kitchen, the dinner turned out magnificently. The turkey came upon the table a perfect miracle of cookery. The pig absolutely looked more beautiful than life, crouching in his bed of parsley, with his head up, and holding an apple daintily between his jaws. The chicken-pie, pinched around the edge into a perfect embroidery by the two plump thumbs of Mrs. Gray, and then finished off by an elaborate border done in key work, would have charmed the most fastidious artist. You have no idea, reader mine, how beautifully colors may be blended on a dinner-table, unless you have seen just the kind of feast to which Mrs. Gray invited her guests. The rich brown of the meats; the snow white bread; the fresh, golden butter; the cranberry sauce, with its bright, ruby tinge. Plates of pies, arranged after a most tempting fashion; golden custard; the deep red tart; the brown mince, and tawny orange color of the pumpkin, filled in alternate wedges, and radiating from the centre of each plate like a star. Water sparkling from the well; the currant wine so brilliantly red—all this, with the sheeted snow of the table-cloth; the gleam of crystal; that old armed-chair at the head of the table, with its soft crimson cushions. I tell you again, reader, it was a Thanksgiving dinner worthy to be remembered. That poor family from the miserable basement in New York did remember it for many a weary day after. Mrs. Gray remembered it, for she had given delicious pleasure to those old people. She had, for that one day at least, lifted them from their toil and depression. Besides, the good woman had other cause to remember the day, and that before she closed her eyes in sleep.

Robert too. In his heart there lingered a remembrance of this dinner long after such things are usually forgotten. And Julia! she was but a child, and like a child should have enjoyed her little feast, but even with her it was an epoch, a mile-stone in the path of her life—a mile-stone wreathed with blossoms, to which in after days she loved to wander back in her imagination, as Pilgrims journey to visit a shrine.

When old Mr. Warren took the great crimson easy chair at the head of the table, and folding his hands earnestly and solemnly, asked a blessing on the food, Mrs. Gray could not forbear stealing another, and more searching glance at his face. She could not be mistaken, somewhere those features had met her eye before: it might be years ago, she could not fix the time or place, but she had seen that forehead, and heard the voice before, of that she become certain.

I will not dwell upon that dinner. The warm, almost too warm hospitality! No wine was wanted to keep up the general cheerfulness; the sparkle of champagne; the dash of crystal; the gush of song were all unnecessary there.

Everything was fresh, earnest, and full of pure enjoyment; even old Mr. Warren smiled happily more than once; and as for Robert, he was perfectly brilliant during the whole meal, saying the drollest things to his aunt, and making Julia laugh every other minute with his sparkling nonsense.

There was one thing that, for a moment, cast a shadow upon the general hilarity. By the great, easy chair occupied by Mr. Warren, stood an empty seat, a plate, knife and glass was before it; but when Mr. Warren asked if any other guest was expected, a profound sigh rose from the recesses of Mrs. Gray's bosom, and she answered sadly that one guest was always expected on Thanksgiving day, but he never came. All the company saw that this was a painful subject, and no more questions were asked; but after dinner, when Robert and Julia were under the old maples, he told her in a low voice that this seat was always kept standing for an uncle of his—Mrs. Gray's only brother—who left home when a youth, and had been a wanderer ever since. For him this empty seat was ever kept. Mrs. Gray, with all her good common sense, had a dash of romance buried deep somewhere in her capacious bosom. It was an old-fashioned, hearty sort of romance, giving depth and vigor to her affections: people might smile at it, but what then? It beautified, and gave wholesome refinement to a character which required something of this kind to tone down its energies, and soften even its best impulses.

Thanksgiving, in New England, is a holiday of the hearthstone, a yearly Sabbath, where friends that are scattered meet with a punctuality that seems almost religious. It is a season of little, pleasant surprises, unexpected friends often drop in to partake of the festival. It was not a very singular idea considering all these things, that good Mrs. Gray should have cherished a fancy as each of these festive holidays came round, that her long absent brother might return to claim his seat at her table. They were orphans—and her home was all that he could claim in his native land. She did hope—and there was something almost of religious faith in the idea—that some day her only brother would surprise them with his presence.

And now the day was over, the landmark of another year had been planted, her guests had departed, and Mrs. Gray sat down in her little parlor alone. There was something melancholy in the solitude to which she was left. Every footfall of the old market horse as he bore away those she had made so happy, seemed to trample out a sweet hope from her heart. There stood the chair—empty, empty, empty—her brother her only brother, would he never come again? And these thoughts stole through her mind, Mrs. Gray folded her arms, and leaning back in the old armed chair that had been her father's, wept, but so gently that one sitting by her would hardly have been aware of it.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1849, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 94.

CHAPTER X.

MISS LANDON says in one of her exquisite novels that the history of a book—the feelings, sufferings and experience of its author would, if truly revealed, be often more touching, more romantic, and full of interest than the book itself—alas, alas, how true this is with me. How mournful would be the history of these pages could I write of that solemn, under current of grief that has swept through my heart while each word has fallen, as it were, mechanically from my pen. I have written in a dream, my mind has been at work while my soul dwelt wholly with another. Between every sentence fear, and grief, and keen anxiety have broken up, known only to myself, leaving no imprint on the page which my heart was tracing. My brother, my noble, young brother, so good, so strong, so full of hopeful life. How many times have I said to my heart as each chapter was commenced, will he live to see the end? By his bed-side I have written—with every sentence I have turned to see if he slept, or was in pain. We had begun to count his life by months then, and as each period of mental toil came round, the wing of approaching death fell more darkly over my page, and over my heart. Reader, do you know how we may live and suffer while the business of life goes regularly on, giving no token of the tears that are silently shed?

Here, here! between this chapter and the last he died. The flowers we laid upon his coffin are scarcely withered; the vibrations of the passing bell have but just swept through the beautiful valley where we laid him down to sleep. While I am yet standing bewildered and grief-stricken in "the valley and shadow of death," for we followed that loved one even to the brink of eternity, rendering him up to God when we might go no further, even there comes this cry from the outer world, "write—write!"

And I must write—my work like his young life

must not be broken off in the middle. Here, in the desolate room where he was an object of so much care, I must gather up the tangled thread of my story. There is nothing to interrupt me now—no faint moan, no gentle and patient call for water or for fruit. The couch is empty—the room silent; nothing is here to interrupt thought save the swell of my own heart—the flow of my own tears.

And she sat waiting for *her* brother, that kind-hearted old huckster-woman, waiting for him on that Thanksgiving night, with the beautiful faith which will not yield up its hope even when everything that can reasonably inspire hope has passed away.

The hired-man had escorted the Irish girl on a visit to some "cousin from her own country;" and Robert was acting as charioteer to the Warren family. Thus it happened that Mrs. Gray was left entirely alone in the old farm-house.

The twilight deepened, but the good woman, lost in profound memories, sat gazing in the fire, unconscious of the gathering darkness: even her housewife thrift was forgotten, and she sat quiet and unconscious for the time. There stood the table, still loaded with the Thanksgiving supper—nothing had been removed—for Mrs. Gray had no idea of more than one grand course at her festive-board. Pies, puddings, beef, fowl, everything came on at once a perfect deluge of hospitality, and thus everything remained a feast in ruins. When her guests went away, the good lady, partly from fatigue, partly from the rush of thick, coming memories, forgot that the table was to be cleared. The lonesome stillness suited her frame of mind, and thus she sat, motionless and sorrowful, brooding amid the vestiges of her Thanksgiving supper.

She was aroused from this unusual state of abstraction by a slight noise among the dishes, and supposing that the sleek, old house-cat had broken bounds for once, she stamped her foot upon the hearth too gently for much effect, and brushing the tears from her eyes,

uttered a faint "get out," as if that hospitable heart smote her for attempting to deprive the cat of a reasonable share in the feast.

Still the noise continued, and added to it was the faint creaking of a chair. She looked around, eagerly arose from her seat, and stood up motionless, with her eyes bent on the table. A man sat in the vacant chair—not the hired-man—for his life he dared not have touched that seat. The apartment was full of shadows, but through them all Mrs. Gray could detect something in the outline of that tall figure that made her heart beat fast. The face turned toward her was somewhat pale, and even through the gloom she felt the flash of two dark eyes riveted upon her.

Mrs. Gray had no thought of robbers—what highwayman could be fancied bold enough to seat himself in that chair? She had no fear of any kind, still her stout limbs began to shake, and when she moved toward the table it was with a wavering step. As she came opposite her brother's chair the intruder leaned forward, threw his arms half across the table and bent his face toward her. That moment the hickory fire flashed up, she rushed close to the table, seized both the large hands stretched toward her, and cried out—"Jacob, brother Jacob—is that you?"

"Well, Sarah, I reckon it isn't anybody else!" said Jacob Strong, holding his sister's hand with a firm grip, though she was trying to shake his over the table with all her might. "You didn't expect me, I suppose?"

It would not do; with all his eccentricity the warm, rude love in Jacob Strong's heart would force its way out. His voice broke; he suddenly planted his elbows on the table, and covering his face with both hands, sobbed aloud.

"Jacob, brother Jacob, don't!" cried Mrs. Gray, coming round the table, her buxom face glistening with tears. "I'm sure it seems as if I should never feel like crying again. Why, Jacob, is it you? I can't seem to have a realizing sense of it yet."

Jacob arose, opened his large arms, and gathered the stout form of Mrs. Gray to his bosom as if she had been a child.

"Sarah, it is the same rough heart, with a great deal of love in it yet. Does not that seem real?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gray, in a soft, deep whisper, "yes, Jacob, now it seems real, but I want to cry more than ever. It seems as if I couldn't stop! I always kind of expected it, but now that you are here, it seems as if I had got you right back from Heaven."

Jacob Strong held his sister still closer to his bosom, and putting up his hand he attempted to smooth her hair with a sort of awkward caress, probably an old habit of his boyhood, but his hand fell upon the muslin and ribands of her cap, and the touch smote him like a reproach. "Oh, Sarah," he said, in a broken voice, "you have grown old. Have I been away so many years?"

"Never mind that now," answered Mrs. Gray, whose kindly heart was moved by the sigh that seemed lifting her from the bosom of her brother. "I have had trouble, and, sure enough, I have grown old, but it seems to me as if I was never so happy."

Jacob tightened his embrace a moment, and then released his sister.

"Get a light, Sarah, let us look at each other."

Mrs. Gray took a brass candlestick from the mantel-piece and kindled a light. Her face was paler than usual and bathed with tears as she turned it toward Jacob. For a time the two gazed on each other with a look of intense interest, an expression of regretful sadness settled on their features, and, without a word, Mrs. Gray set down the light.

"Is it age, Sarah, or trouble that has turned your hair so grey?" said Jacob, a moment after when both were seated at the hearth. He paused, a choking sensation came in his throat, and then he added with an effort, "have I helped do it, was it mourning because I went off and never wrote?"

"No, no, do not think that," was the kind reply, "I always knew that there must be some good reason for it, I always expected that you would come back and that we should grow old together."

"Then it was not trouble about me?"

"Nothing of the kind, I knew that you would never do anything really wrong, something in my heart always told me that you were alive and about some good work, what, I could not tell, but though I longed to see you, and wondered often where you were, I was just as sure that all would end right, and that you would come back safe as if an angel from Heaven had told me so!"

"Yet I was doing wrong all the time, Sarah," answered Jacob, smitten to the heart by the honest sisterly faith betrayed in Mrs. Gray's speech. "It was cruel to leave you—cruel not to write. But it appeared to me as if I had some excuse. You were settled in life—and so much older. It did not seem as if you could care so much for me with a husband to think of. Besides, you and Eunice were so much nearer the same age. I was a boy, you know, and could not realize that two full grown married women really could be my sisters."

"You knew when poor Eunice died?" answered Mrs. Gray. "You heard, no doubt, that she was buried by her husband not three months after the fever took him off: and about the baby."

"No, no, I never heard, I was too full of other things. I did not even know that your husband was gone, till a man up yonder, called you the Widow Gray, when I inquired if you lived here. The last news I heard was years ago, when your husband left home and settled here on the Island."

"He died that very year," answered Mrs. Gray, with a gentle fall of the voice, "I have been alone ever since—all but little Robert."

"Little Robert, have you a child, then, Sarah, I did not know that!"

"No, it wasn't my child, poor Eunice left a boy behind her. The dearest, sweetest little fellow, I wish you could have seen him when he first came here, not three months old, so feeble and helpless—in his mother's sickness he hadn't been tended as children ought to be, and he was the palest, thinnest little creature. I wasn't much used to babies, but somehow God teaches us a way when we have the will—and no creature ever prayed for assistance as I did

Sometimes when the little thing fell to sleep, moaning in my arms, it sounded as if it must wake up with its mother in Heaven, but good nursing and new milk, warm from the cow, soon brought out roses and dimples. He grew, I never did see a child grow like him, and so good-natured."

"But now? where is the boy now?" questioned Jacob.

"He was here this forenoon, almost a man grown. You have been away so long, Jacob. He was here and ate his Thanksgiving dinner. A perfect gentleman, too, I declare I was almost ashamed to kiss him, he's grown so."

"Then you have brought him up on the place?"

"No, Jacob, we never had a gentleman in our family that I ever heard on, so I determined to make one of Robert."

"And how did you go to work?" questioned Jacob, with a grim smile, "I've tried it myself, but we're a tough family to mould over, I never could do more than make a tolerably honest man out of my share of the old stock."

"Oh, Robert was naturally gifted," answered Mrs. Gray, with great complacency.

"He did not get it from our side of the house that's certain," muttered Jacob, "the very gates on the old farm always swung awkwardly."

"But his father, he was an 'Otis,' you know. Robert looks a good deal like his father, and took to his learning just as naturally as he did to the new milk, he was born a gentleman. I remember Mr. Leicester said those very words the first time he came here."

Jacob gave a faint start, and half clenching his hand, said, only half letting out his breath—"who, who?"

"Mr. Leicester, the best friend Robert ever had. He used to come over here to board sometimes for weeks together, for there was deer in the woods then, and fish in the ponds, enough to keep a sportsman busy at least four months in the year. He took a great interest in Robert from the first, and taught him almost everything—no school could have made Robert what he is."

"And this man has had the teaching of my sister's child," muttered Jacob, shading his face with one hand. "Everywhere—everywhere, he trails himself in my path."

Mrs. Gray looked at her brother very earnestly, "you are tired!" she said.

"No I was listening. So this man, this Mr. Leicester, you like him then? he has been good to you?"

Mrs. Gray hesitated and bent her eyes upon the fire. "Good—yes he has been good to us, and as for liking him I ought to. I know how ungrateful it is, but somehow, Jacob, I'll own it to you, I never did like Mr. Leicester with my whole heart, I'm ashamed to look you in the face and say this, but it's the truth, perhaps it was his education, or something."

"No, Sarah, it was your heart, your own upright heart, that stirred within you. I have felt it a thousand times, struggled against it, been ashamed of it, but an honest heart is always right. When it shrinks

and grows cold at the approach of a stranger, depend on it, that stranger is to be avoided. Never grieve or blush for this heart warning. It is only the honest who feel it. Vile things do not tremble as they touch each other."

"Why, Jacob, Jacob, you do not mean to say that it was right for me to dislike Mr. Leicester, to dread his coming, to feel sometimes as if I wanted to snatch Robert from his side and run off with him, I'm sure it has been a great trouble to me, and I've prayed and prayed not to be so ungrateful—now you speak as if it was right all the time—but you don't know all; you will blame me as I blame myself after I tell you it was through Mr. Leicester that Robert got his situation with one of the richest and greatest merchants in New York, and that he was paid a salary from the first, though hundreds and hundreds of rich men's sons would have jumped at the place without pay; now, Jacob, I'm sure you'll think me wrong."

"Wrong," repeated Jacob, with emphasis, "but no matter now; the time has gone by when it would do good to talk all this over. But tell me, Sarah, what were the studies he seemed most earnest that Robert should understand? What books did they read together, what was the general tone of discourse?"

"I'm sure it's impossible for me to tell, they read all sorts of books, there on the swing shelf you will find most of them."

Jacob arose, and taking up a light examined the books pointed out to him, while his sister stood by, gazing alternately upon his face and the volumes, as if some new and vague fear had all at once possessed her.

There was nothing in the volumes which Jacob beheld to excite apprehension even in the most rigid moralist. Some of the books were elementary, the rest purely classical, a few were in French, but they bore no taint of the loose morals or vicious philosophy which has rendered the modern literature of France as contemptible, if that could be, as her national politics.

Jacob drew a deep breath, and re-placing the light on the mantel-piece, sat down. His feelings and suspicions were not in the least changed, but the inspection of those books had baffled him. Mrs. Gray sat watching him with great anxiety.

"There is nothing wrong in the books, is there?" she said, at length.

"No!" was the absent reply.

"You could tell, I suppose, for it seemed as if you were reading. It is foreign language, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And you can read it?"

"Yes!"

"But how, where did you get so much learning?" Jacob did not hear her. He was lost in profound thought, striving to search out some clue which would reveal the motives of that evil man for the interest he had taken in Robert Otis.

"And these were all my nephew studied?" he said, at length, still pondering upon what had been told him.

"No, not all. Those were the books, but then Mr. Leicester thought more of music and drawing, but most of all writing. Hours and hours he would spend

over that. Every kind of writing, not coarse hand and fine hand as you and I learned to write—but every thing was given him to copy. Old letters, names!—I remember he practiced one whole month writing over different names from a great pile of letters that Mr. Leicester brought for copies.”

“Ha!” ejaculated Jacob Strong, now keenly interested, “so he was taught to copy these names?”

“Yes, and he did it so beautifully, sometimes you could not have known one from the other. The more exactly alike he made them, the more Mr. Leicester was pleased. I used to tell Robert to beat the copy if he could, and some of the names were crabbed enough, but Mr. Leicester said that wasn’t the object.”

“No, it wasn’t the object,” muttered Jacob, and now his eyes flashed, for he had obtained the clue.

“One week, I remember,” persisted Mrs. Gray, “he wrote and wrote, and all the time on one name I fairly got tired of the sight of it, and Robert too; but Mr. Leicester said that he would never be a clerk without perfect penmanship.”

“And this one name, what was it?” inquired Jacob, with keen interest.

Mrs. Gray opened a stand-drawer, and took out a copy book filled with loose scraps of paper.

Jacob examined the book and the scraps of paper separately and together. Mrs. Gray was wrong when she said it was a single name only. In the book, and on loose fragments were notes of hand, evidently imitated from some genuine original, with checks on various city banks, apparently drawn at random, and merely as a practice in penmanship: but one bank was more frequently mentioned than the others, and this fact Jacob treasured in his mind.

“This name,” he said, touching a signature to one of these papers—“whose is it?”

“Why it is the merchant that Robert is with,” answered Mrs. Gray. “That is the one he wrote over so often.”

“I thought so!” said Jacob, drily, and laying the copy-book down, he seemed to cast it from his mind.

Mrs. Gray had become unfamiliar with the features of her relative, or she would have seen that deep and stern feelings were busy within him, but now she only thought him anxious and tired out with the excitement of returning home after so many years of absence.

They sat together on the hearth, more silent than seemed natural to persons thus united, when a foot-step upon the crisp leaves brought a glow to Mrs. Gray’s cheek.

“I thought there was a sound of wheels,” she said, eagerly. “It is Robert come back from the ferry!—how he will be surprised!”

“Not now!” said Jacob Strong. “I would rather not see him to-night—do not tell him that I am here!”

“But he will stay all night!” pleaded Mrs. Gray, whose kind heart was overflowing with the hope of presenting the youth to his uncle without delay.

“So much the better: I can see something of him without being known. Where does that door lead?”

“To a spare bed-room!”

“His bed-room?”

“No. Robert will sleep up stairs in his own chamber—he always does.”

“Very well, I will take that room: say nothing of my return. When he is in bed I will come out again.”

“Dear me how strange all this is—how can I keep still?—how can I help telling him?” murmured the good woman, half following Jacob into the dark bedroom, “I never kept a secret in my life. He will certainly find me out.”

“Hush!” said Jacob, in an emphatic whisper, from the bed-room: “I will lay down upon the bed: leave the door partly open: now take your seat again where the light will fall on you both. Go—go!”

Mrs. Gray took her seat again, looking very awkward and conscious-stricken; Robert came in flushed with his ride. It was a sharp autumnal evening, a brilliant color lay in his cheeks, and the rich hair was blown about his forehead. He flung off his sacque, and cast it down with the heavy whip he carried in one hand.

“Well, aunt, I am back again—that old horse, like wine I have tasted, grows stronger and brighter as he gets old.”

“But where is he?—the hired-man went away at dark,” said Mrs. Gray, anxious for the comfort of her horse.

“Never mind him. I put the blessed poney up myself. You should have heard the old fellow whinny as I gave out his oats. He knew me again.”

“Of course he did. I should like see anything on the place forget you, Robert, it wouldn’t stay here long, I give my word for it.”

“Oh, aunt, I would not have even a horse or dog sent from the old place for a much greater sin—I know what it is?”

“But you never were sent off, Robert.”

“No, aunt, but I went. Instead of superintending the place, and taking the labor from your shoulders, who have no one else to depend on—I must set up for a gentleman—see city life, aunt—I wish from the bottom of my heart that I had never left you!”

“Why, Robert—why do you wish this? O, if you really are homesick, why not come back again?”

“Come back again, aunt!” said the youth, with sudden and bitter earnestness. “Is there any coming back in this life? When we are changed and places are changed, always ourselves most, how can a return to one spot be called coming back?”

“But I am not changed—the place is just as it was,” pleaded the kind aunt.

“But I am changed, aunt—I can throw myself by your side, and lay my head upon your lap as if I were a petted child still, but it would not be natural—we could not force ourselves into believing it natural.”

“How strangely you talk, Robert, to me you are a child yet.”

“But to myself I am *not* a child, I have thought, felt—yes, even now I have suffered only as men think, feel and suffer. Oh, aunt, if I had never lived with any one but you how much better it would have been.”

The youth had cast himself on the hearth by his aunt, and rested his beautiful head upon her knee.

Teary, those warm, bright tears that youth alone can shed, filled his eyes without impairing their brightness.

The old lady pressed her hand upon his hair, and looked lovingly into those brimming eyes. "And this comes of being a gentleman!" she whispered, shaking her head with a gentle motion.

The youth gave a faint shudder, and, turning his head so that his eyes were buried in the folds of her dress, sobbed aloud.

"Why, Robert, Robert, what is this?—what trouble is upon you?"

"None, aunt—nothing. I am only in a fit of the blues just now. It makes me homesick to see you all alone here, that is all!" answered the youth, lifting his face, and shaking back the curls from his forehead, while he attempted one of his old careless smiles, but vainly enough.

The old lady was distressed. "Is it money, Robert; have you been extravagant? The salary is a very handsome one; but if you have wanted more clothes, or anything, I wouldn't mind giving you twenty or thirty dollars. There now, will that do?"

Blessed old woman, she did not understand the half-sad, half-comic smile that curled those young lips, and thinking, in her innocence, that she had dived to the heart of his mystery, her own face beamed with satisfaction.

"That is it, I see through it all now; come, how much shall it be, twenty, thirty, forty? It's extravagant, I know, but this day of all others, I feel as if it would do me good to give somebody everything I have in the world; there, nephew, there, two tens—three fives—a three, and, and—yes, I have it—here is a two. Now brighten up, and next time don't be afraid to come and tell me: only, Robert, remember the fate of the prodigal son, the husks, the tears—not that I wouldn't kill the petted calf—not that I wouldn't forgive you, Bob, I couldn't help it, but it would break my heart. If I was to be called on for the sacrifice, I couldn't eat a morsel of the animal, I'm sure. So you won't be extravagant and spend the hard earnings of your old aunt, at any rate till after I'm dead, Robert."

The good woman had worked herself up to a state of almost ludicrous sorrow with the future her fancy was coloring. Her hands shook as she drew an old black pocket-book from some mysterious place in the folds of her dress, and counting out the bank-notes as they were enumerated, crowded them into Robert's hand. The youth had altered very strangely while she was speaking. His face was pale and red in alternate flashes; his lips quivered, and with a convulsive movement he pressed his eyelids down, thus crushing back the tears that swelled against them. Mrs. Gray attempted to press the bank-notes upon him, but his hand was cold, and his fingers refused to clasp the money. Drawing back with a faint struggle, he said—"no, no, aunt, I do not want it! Indeed it would do me no good!"

"Do you no good? What! is it not money that you want?" cried the kind woman. "Nonsense, nonsense, Robert, here take it—take it. I wouldn't mind ten dollars more—it does seem as if I was

crazy, but then I really would not mind it scarcely at all!"

Robert was more composed now. The hot flushes had left his face very pale, and with a look of firm resolve upon it.

"No, aunt," he said, gently putting back the money, "I will not take it. The salary I receive ought to be enough for my support, and it shall; besides, I tell you but the simple truth, that money would do me no good whatever."

The old lady took up the crushed notes, smoothed them across her knee with both hands over and over in a puzzled and dissatisfied way.

"What is it that you are worried about, if money will not answer?" she said, at length.

"Nothing, aunt—why should you think it?" He spoke slowly and in a wavering voice at first, then with a sort of reckless impetuosity he broke into a laugh. It was not his old gleeful laugh, and Mrs. Gray only looked startled by it.

"There now, put up the old pocket-book, and give me a hearty night kiss," he said, hurriedly, "I shall be off in the morning before you are up."

"Good night, Robert," said Mrs. Gray, with a meek and disappointed air. "That kiss is the first one that ever fell heavily on your old aunt's heart. You are keeping something back from me."

"No, aunt, no!" The words were uttered faintly, and Mrs. Gray felt that the ardor of truth was not there. For a moment both were silent; Robert had lighted a candle and stood on the hearth looking hard into the blaze, he turned his eyes slowly upon his aunt. She sat with one hand upon the pocket-book, gazing into the fire. There was anxiety and doubt in her features. Robert sighed heavily.

"Good night, aunt."

"Good night."

She listened to each slow footstep as her nephew went up the stairs. When his chamber-door closed, she buckled the strap around her pocket-book, and dropped it with a deep sigh into its repository among her voluminous skirts.

"I cannot understand it," she murmured—"I cannot make out what ails him!"

All at once she remembered the presence of her brother, and her face brightened. "Jacob will know what it means. Jacob, Jacob!"

Mrs. Gray uttered the name of her brother in a whisper, but it brought him forth at once.

"Well, Jacob, you have seen him—you have heard him talk. Isn't he something worth loving?"

"He is worth loving and worth serving too," answered Jacob. "Sarah, I did not think anything on earth could make my heart beat as the sight of that boy did."

"He is in trouble, you see that, Jacob, and would not take money! What can it mean?"

"I saw all—heard all. His nature is noble—his will strong—have no fear. He needs a firmer hand than yours, my good Sarah, I will take care of him."

"I did not give a hint about you."

"That was right. It is best that he should know nothing about me, at least for the present."

"But I should so like to tell him!" said Mrs. Gray.

"And you shall in time, but not yet. I must know more and see more first."

"Well, you ought to know best," answered the sister, in a tone of gentle submission. "I'm sure he quite bewilders me!"

"Now," said Jacob, seating himself, "let us leave the boy to his rest. I wish to talk with you about old times—about the people down East."

"It is a long time since I was in Maine, Jacob, I've almost forgotten all about the folks."

"But there was one family that you will remember. Old Mr. Wilcox's, I am anxious to hear about him."

There was something constrained and unnatural in Jacob's manner, he had evidently forced himself to appear calm when every word was sharpened with keen anxiety.

Mrs. Gray shook her head, Jacob's heart fell as he saw the motion. "Nothing, can you tell me nothing?" he said, with an expression of deep anguish. "Oh, Sarah, try, try! you do not know how much happiness a word from you would bring!"

"If I could but speak it," said Mrs. Gray, "how glad I should be. Mr. Wilcox sold out and left Maine about the time we moved on to the Island, where he went, or why he went no one ever heard. It was a very strange thing, everybody thought so at the time!"

Jacob uttered a faint groan, her words had taken the last hope from his heart. "And this is all you know, Sarah?"

"It is all anybody knows of old Mr. Wilcox or his family. There was a daughter, she left home first. Let me think, that was just before you left the old gentleman; nobody ever heard of her either. What is the matter, are you going away, Jacob?"

"Yes, I will talk over these things another time. Good night, Sarah. I will just throw myself on the bed till day-break."

"But you are not going away then?"

"Yes! but you will see me often, I shall stay near you, in the city perhaps."

"Why not here? I have enough for us both, and we two are all that is left, almost. It seems hard that you should leave me so soon."

"Not now, Sarah, by and by we will settle down and grow old together, but the time has not come yet."

"I forgot to ask, are you married, Jacob?"

"Married!" answered Jacob Strong, and a grim, hard smile crept over his lips. "No, I was never married. Good night, Sarah."

"There, now I suppose I've been inquisitive, and worried him," thought Mrs. Gray, as the bed-room

door closed upon her brother. "What a Thanksgiving it has been! who would have thought this morning that he would sleep under my roof to-night! and Robert close by, without knowing a word of it. Well, faith is a beautiful thing after all—I was certain that he would come back alive, and sure enough he has!"

Thus Mrs. Gray ruminated, unconscious of the lapse of time, till a sense of fatigue crept over her. Still she was keenly wakeful, for, unused to excitement of any kind, the agitation crowded upon her that day forbade all inclination to sleep. There was a large moreen couch in the room, and as the night wore on, she lay down upon it, still thoughtful and oppressed with the weight of her overwrought feelings. Thus she lay till the candle burned out, and there was no light in the room, save that which came from a bed of embers and the rays of a waning moon, half exhausted in the maple boughs against the windows.

A sleepy sensation was at length conquering the strong excitement that had kept her so long watchful, when she was aroused by the soft tread of a foot upon the stairs. Quietly, and with frequent pauses it came downward, the door opened and Mrs. Gray saw her nephew, in his night clothes and barefooted glide across the room. He went directly to an old-fashioned work-stand near the bed-room door, and opened one of the drawers. Then followed a faint rustle of papers, and he stole back again, softly and thief-like, with something in his hand.

It was strange that Mrs. Gray did not speak, but some unaccountable feeling kept her silent, and after she heard him cautiously enter his room again, the reflection that there was nothing but his own little property in the stand tranquilized her. "He wanted something from the drawer, and so come down softly that I might not be disturbed," she thought. "But then his face, what made that pale, as he stood for a moment by the window? The moonbeam, it was the pearly whiteness of the moonbeams. Who ever looked otherwise standing in the autumn moonlight?" Thus the kind lady re-assured herself, and with these gentle thoughts in her mind she fell asleep.

Mrs. Gray awoke early in the morning, and softly entered the spare bed-room. It was empty. No vestige of her brother's visit remained. Like a ghost he came, like a ghost he had departed. She went up stairs; the nephew was gone. Sometime during that day she happened to think of his visit to the work-stand. The old copy-book was missing.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PALACES. AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1819, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 128.

CHAPTER XI.

It was two nights after Thanksgiving. Leicester had thrown himself upon a couch in his chamber. A little sofa-table was by his elbow, and upon it a small and richly chased salver overflowing with notes and letters. Most of them were unopened, for he had been absent several days, and it often happened that when he once knew a handwriting, and did not fancy the correspondence, letters remained for weeks unread, on that little table, even when he was at home.

But this morning Leicester seemed to have nerved himself to read everything that came to hand. Bills, letters heavy with red wax from the counting-room, and even dirty, square-shaped missives, stamped with keys or thimbles, passed successively through his hands. These coarse letters he took up first, sorting them out with his white fingers, and tossing aside with a smile of quiet contempt those more delicate notes with which they were interspersed, whose very envelops bespoke a dubious and meretricious errand. Rose-tinted and azure paper, glittering with gold and fancy seals, abounded there. These notes, breathing a voluptuous odor, and eloquent of that sentimental foppery from which deep, pure feeling recoils, Leicester flung aside in disgust. But when all the business letters were read, he selected from this perfumed mass three little snow white notes, traced in delicate characters, that seemed yet unsteady with the trembling hand that had written them. A single drop of pale green wax, stamped with a gem, held this envelop, and in all things these notes were singularly chaste, and unlike those he had left, so contemptuously, unread. He broke the seals coldly, and without the least display of feeling perused each note according to its date. The contents must have been full of eloquence, wild and passionate, for they brought the color even to his hardened cheek, and toward the last he became somewhat excited.

"By Jove, it is a pity these could not be published. How the creature writes—a perfect nightingale pouring forth her heart in tears. After all it is amusing to see down-right, earnest love like this. One—two—three—I wonder if there are no more?"

He began tossing over the notes again. "Yes, yes, here is another, like a snow drop in a cloud of butterflies. No, how is this? the seal black, the handwriting delicately rigid, that of my lady mother."

He spoke a little anxiously, and, unfolding the note, read the few lines it contained with a darkened brow.

"Ill—is she, poor girl, ill, and delirious at times,

unfortunate that; physicians must be called, nurses—all a torment and a plague. My friend Robert has been of little use here, after all: I did think his handsome face might have helped me softly out of the whole business. Now, here is the question—shall I go up—re-assure her—take her away from the old lady—brave her friends? No, it is not worth while; a bullet through the brain must be unpleasant, especially to a reflecting mind; and these haughty southerners make short settlements. Besides, I hate scenes. But then the girl is ill, has fretted herself to the brink of the grave. These are the very words—I wonder my stately mamma ever brought herself to utter anything so pathetic. Well, she *has* suffered, the worst is over. When all hope is extinguished she will find consolation, or die. Die, that would end all—but then death is so gloomy, and she does write exquisite letters."

His lips ceased to utter these cold thoughts, and falling back on the couch he closed his eyes, still holding the open note in one hand. It was painful to see how calm and passionless his features remained while he settled in his mind the destiny of one who had loved him so much. After some ten minutes he opened his eyes, turned softly on the couch, and laid down his mother's letter.

"No, I will not go near her," he said, "and yet this is another heart that I am casting away—another that has loved me. How soon—how soon shall I have need of affection? A whole life, conquest upon conquest, and yet never truly loved save by these two women. The first and the last. It is strange, but this moment my heart softens toward them both. What, a tear in Leicester's eye!" and with a look of thrilling self-contempt the bad man started up, scoffing at the only pure feeling that had swelled his bosom for months.

A waiter stood in the door. "Sir, there is a man below, who says you told him to call."

"What does he seem like?"

"A hack-driver. He says you employed him one rainy night, a long time ago, and ordered him to come again when he had news to bring!"

"What, a tall, awkward fellow, with a stoop in the shoulders—tremendous feet and hands?"

"That's the man, sir."

"Send him up, I did tell him to call."

A few minutes, and Jacob Strong stood in Leicester's chamber, self-possessed even in his exaggerated awkwardness, and with a look of shrewd intelligence which recommended itself to Leicester at once. In their previous acquaintance the man of the world had

applied solely to self-interest in the supposed hackman, and he hoped to make this rude, sharp intellect useful to himself. It would have been a strong contrast to one acquainted with them both, the deep, wily, elegant man of the world—the honest, firm, shrewd man of the people. These two were fettered together in the game of life, and though one was unconsciously looking upon his antagonist as an instrument, nothing more, and though the other was often compelled to grapple hard with his passions, that they might lead him to no false move—the game was a trial of skill worth studying.

"You told me to find out who the lady was and where she lived, sir; it took time, for these great people are always moving about, but I have done it."

"I was sure that you were to be depended on—my good fellow, there is your money; now tell me all about it. Who is she? Where does she live, and when have you seen her?"

Jacob took the offered piece of gold, turned it over in his palm as if estimating its value, and then laid it on the table before Leicester.

"I don't jist like to give up the money," he said, eyeing the gold with well acted greed; "but perhaps you will help me in a way I like better."

"How!—what can be better than money?" questioned Leicester. "I thought you Yankees considered the almighty dollar above all things."

"No, there may be things that we like better than that, though we do love to put down the root of evil whenever we can get seed, just as I wan't to plant that are gold eagle where it will bring a crop of the same sort."

"Oh, that is it!" said Leicester, laughing, "I thought there must be something to come. But do you remember the old proverb about a 'bird in the hand'?"

"Well, yes. It seems to me as if I did remember something about it," answered Jacob, putting his huge hand to his forehead, "'a bird in the hand is worth two in the brush,' isn't that the poetry you mean?"

"Yes, that is quite near enough; now tell me about this lady, and we will talk of the reward after. You found the number of the house?"

"No. It wasn't numbered, but that made no difference, she didn't live there; only staid one night. Besides she wasn't a lady, only kind of help, you know!"

"A governess or waiting-maid, I thought so," exclaimed Leicester. "Very well, where is she now?"

"Oh! she went away with the folks that she had been living with, up to Saratoga and about; then she come back, and they all went off together across the water, to where she came from."

"What, to Europe? Then that is the last of her! Very well, my good fellow, you have earned the money."

Jacob looked keenly at the gold, but did not take it.

"Perhaps," said he, shifting his weight from one foot to the other—"perhaps you can tell me of some one that wants a hired-man to drive carriage, or do almost any kind of chores. I'm out of work just now, and its costs everything to live here in York."

Leicester was interested. His personal habits rendered an attendant necessary, and yet he had of late been unable to supply himself with one that could at the same time be useful and discreet. Here was a person, evidently new to the world, honest, and with a degree of shrewdness that might be invaluable, ready to accept any situation that might offer. Could he but attach this man to his person, interest his affections, what more useful agent, or more serviceable dependant could be found? Still there was risk in it. Leicester with his lightning habit of thought resolved the idea in his mind, while Jacob stood looking upon the floor, inly a fire with intense excitement, but to all outward appearance steadily calm.

"You don't know of any one then?" he said, at last, with assumed indifference. "Well, I don't see how I shall get along."

Leicester looked at him searchingly. Jacob felt the glance, and met it with a calm, dull expression of the eye, that completely deceived the man who was trying with such art to read him to the soul.

"What if I were to engage you myself?"

"Well, now, I should be awful glad!"

"Do you read? Of course, what down Easter does not? But are you fond of reading?—in the habit of picking up books and papers?"

Jacob saw the drift of this question at once.

"Wal, yes. I can read a chapter in the Bible, or a piece in the English reader, I suppose, as well as most folks, though I haven't tried much late years. But then if you want a feller to read books for you, why I don't think we should agree. I was set agin them at school, and haven't got over it yet."

"You know how to write, of course?"

He made one of his shuffling bows, and began to brush his hat with the sleeve of his coat.

"You need not wait; we will talk about the wages to-morrow," said Leicester. "Meantime if you can gather any more information about—about the lady, you know it would be a praiseworthy introduction to your new duties."

Jacob bowed again and edged himself toward the door. "I will do my best, you may depend on it, sir. At what time shall I come to-morrow?"

"At ten or two, it does not signify. If I am not in wait!"

"I will!" muttered Jacob, when he found himself alone. "It is something to have learned how to wait, as you shall find my new master—*master!*" and Jacob laughed inly.

CHAPTER XII.

It had been a brilliant season in the fashionable world that year. Saratoga and Newport were perfect hot-beds of gaiety, splendor and trivial ambition. A thorough bred nobleman or two from England—a German countess—the greatest and most popular statesmen of our own land, had flung a dazzling splendor over these places. But even amid all this false life and *edat* there was one person whose dress, wit and beauty become the theme of general comment. She had taken rooms at Saratoga late in the season—accommodations for half a dozen servants—stabling

for almost as many horses, all was in preparation long before the lady herself appeared. There was something about this to puzzle and bewilder the most thorough bred gossip of a watering-place. The servants were foreign, and thoroughly educated to their vocation. When questioned regarding their mistress, they spoke of her without apparent restraint, and always as my lady, or the countess. But there was no title attached to the name under which the superb suite of apartments had been engaged. Mrs. Garden! Nothing could be more simple and unpretending. If there was a title behind it, as the indiscretion of the servants seemed to intimate, she was only the more interesting. Her servants had lounged about the United States a whole fortnight; her horses had been gently exercised by the grooms just enough to attract attention to their superb beauty, and to keep the spirit of gossip and curiosity alive. A lady's maid had for days been making a sensation at the servant's table by her broken English and Parisian finery. At last came the lady, very simply dressed, very quiet and self-reliant, neither courting attention nor seeming in the least desirous of avoiding it. She brought no letters, sought no introductions. The various fashionable cliques, with their reigning queens, seemed scarcely to attract the notice of this singular woman, though a mischievous smile would sometimes dawn upon her beautiful mouth, as some petty nonsense for superiority passed before her. A creature so calm, so tranquil, so quietly regardless of contending cliques and fashionable factions, was certain to become an object of peculiar attention, even though rare personal beauty, and all the appliances of great wealth had been wanting. The reputation of a title, the graceful repose of manners just enough tinged with foreign grace to be piquant, and, above all, the novelty of a face and position singularly unlike anything known at the Springs that season, could not fail to excite a sensation. If the lady had designed to secure for herself with one graceful fling a place among the *elite* of American fashion, she could not have managed more adroitly. But even the design was doubtful—she scarcely seemed conscious of the position after it had been awarded to her, and accepted it with a sort of graceful scorn at last, as if yielding herself to the caprice of others, not to her own wishes. In less than three weeks after her domestication at the Springs, this stranger, announced without introduction, without seeming effort, become the reigning belle and toast of the higher circles. Her dress was copied—her wit quoted—her manners become a model to all aspiring young ladies, and, with all her power, she was the most popular creature in the world, affable to all, gentle, unassuming to those whom other fashionable leaders were ready to crush with a look and wither by a frown. Haughty only when thrown in contact with assumption and innate coarseness, which soon shrunk from her keen wit and smiling sarcasms, she was feared by the few, but loved, nay, almost worshipped, by the many.

When the season broke up and the glittering waves of high life ebbed back to the cities, this woman had attained a power, a firm, social position, unassailable even by the most envious and the most daring. Still

she was as completely unknown as on the first day of her appearance. Of herself she never spoke, and from the strange serving-man who maintaining the most profound respect, always hovered about her, nothing but vague hints could be obtained. But these hints, apparently won from a simple and hesitating nature, always served to inflame rather than satisfy curiosity. One thing was certain. The lady had seen much of foreign life—had travelled in every penetrable country, and her wealth seemed as great as her beauty. More than this no one knew, and this very ignorance, strange as it may seem, added strength to her position. The way in which she shrouded herself had its own fascination. True, it might conceal low birth, even shame, but it had pleased the fashionable world to bury a high European title under all this mystery, and this belief the lady neither aided nor contradicted, for she seemed profoundly unconscious of its existence. With no human being had she become so intimate that a question on the subject might be directly hazarded. With all her graceful affability there was something about her that forbade all intrusive scrutiny. She came to Saratoga beautiful, wealthy, unknown. She left it a brilliant enigma, only the more brilliant that she was mysterious.

Mrs. Garden, for thus was the lady known, came to New York early in the autumn, and in the great emporium began a new phase of her erratic and brilliant life.

A mansion, in the upper part of the city, had been in the course of erection during the previous year. It was a castellated villa in the very suburbs, standing upon the gentle swell of a hill, and commanding a fine view both of the city, and the beautiful scenery that lies upon the North and East Rivers. A few ancient trees, rooted when New York was almost a distant city, stood around this dwelling, sheltering with their old and leafy branches the glowing flowers and rare shrubbery with which the grounds of considerable extent were crowded. This dwelling, so graceful in its architecture, so fairy-like in its grounds, had risen as if by magic among those old trees. Lavish was the cost bestowed upon it; rich and faultless was the furniture that arrived from day to day after the masons and artists had completed their work. Statues of Parian marble, rich bronzes, antique carvings in wood, and the most sumptuous upholstery were arranged by the architect who had superintended the building, and who received the most minute written directions from some person abroad.

When all was arranged, drawing-rooms, library, ladies' boudoir and sleeping chambers, that might have sheltered the repose of an Eastern princess, the house was closed. Those who passed it could now and then catch a glimpse of some richly painted sash through a half fastened shutter; and glowing through the hot-house windows might be seen a little world of exotic plants, dropping their rich blossoms to waste; while beyond, the walls were laden with fruit ripening in the artificial atmosphere. Grapes and nectarines falling from bough and vine, untasted, in the time of roses, or only to be gathered stealthily by the old man who had temporary charge of the grounds.

Thus everything remained close and silent, like some enchanted palace of fairy land week after week, till the autumn came on. Since the architect left it no person save the old gardener had ever been observed to enter even the delicate iron railing that encompassed the grounds. True, the neighbors to whom this dwelling had become an object of great interest, were heard to assert that at a time, early in the summer, lights had been observed one stormy night in the second-story, and even high up in the principal turret. Some even persisted that before it was quite dark, a close carriage had been driven up to the door and away again, leaving two or three persons who certainly entered the house. After that carriage wheels had more than once made themselves heard above the storm, rolling to and fro as if people were coming and going all night. But the next morning, when all the neighborhood was alive with curiosity, this dwelling stood as before, stately and silent, amid the old forest trees. The shutters were closed; the gate locked. Not a trace could be found proving that any human being had entered the premises. So the whole story was generally set down as an Irish fiction, though the servant girl who originated it, persisted stoutly that she had not only seen lights and heard the wheels, but had caught glimpses of a cashmere shawl within the door; and of a little barefooted girl, with a basket on her arm, coming out half an hour after and alone. But there stood the closed and silent house—and there was the talkative old gardener in contradiction of this marvelous tale. Besides carriages were always going up and down the avenue upon which the dwelling stood, and out of this the girl had probably found material for her fiction. Certain it was that from this time till autumn no being was seen to enter the silent palace.

Then in the first golden flush of autumn the house was flung open. Carriages came to and fro almost every hour. Saddle-horses, fancy phaetons, and an equipage yet more stately drove in and out of the stables. The windows, with all their wreaths of gorgeously tinted glass, were opened to the golden and hazy atmosphere. Grooms hung around the stables; footmen glided over the tessellated marble of the entrance-hall; and conspicuous among the rest, was one tall, awkwardly-shaped man, who came and went apparently at pleasure. His duties seemed difficult to define even by the curious neighbors. Sometimes he drove the carriage, but never unless the lady of the mansion rode in it. Sometimes he opened the door. Again he might be seen in the conservatory grouping flowers with the taste and delicacy of a professed artist, or in the hot-houses gathering fruit and arranging it in rich masses of color for the table. It was marvelous to see the beautiful effect produced by those great, awkward hands. The very japonicas and red roses seemed to become more glowing and delicate beneath his touch. But after the first week this man almost wholly disappeared from the dwelling. Sometimes he might be seen stealing gently in at nightfall, or very early in the morning; but his active superintendence was over, he seemed to be no longer an inmate, but one who came to the place occasionally to inquire after old friends.

But the mistress of all this splendor—the beautiful woman who sometimes came smilingly forth to enter her carriage, who sauntered now and then into the conservatory, blooming as the flowers that surrounded her—mature in her loveliness as the fruit that hung upon the walls bathed in the golden sunshine—who was this woman with her unparalleled attractions—her almost fabulous wealth? The world asked this question without an answer—for the Mrs. Garden of Saratoga, and the Adeline Leicester of our story, satisfied no curiosity regarding her personal history. She visited no one who did not first seek her companionship, and thus deprived society of its right to question her.

We who know this woman by her right name and in her true character, that of a disappointed, erring but still affectionate being, might wonder at her bloom, her smiling cheerfulness, her easy and gentle repose of look and manner, but that human nature is full of such contradictions, teeming with serpents absolutely hidden and bathed in the perfume of flowers. If Adeline Leicester smiled she was not the less sad at heart. If her manners were easy, and her voice sweet, it was habit—the necessity of pleasing others that had rendered these things a second nature to her, with one great, and, we may add, almost holy object at heart. She pursued it earnestly, while all the routine of life went on as if she had no thought of the world, and no pleasure or aim beyond the luxurious life which seemed to render her existence one continued gleam of Paradise. Hitherto we have seen this woman in the agony of perverted love—perverted, though legal, for its object was vile, and worship of a base thing is hideous according to its power. We have seen her bowed down with grief, grovelling to the very soil of her native valley in passionate agony! But these were phases in her life, and extremes of character which seldom appeared before the world.

It is a mistake when people fancy that any life can be made up of unmitigated sorrow. Even evil has its excitement and its gleams of wild pleasure, vivid and keen. The sting of conscience is sometimes forgotten; the viper buried so deeply in flowers that his presence is scarcely felt, till uncoiling with a fling he dashes them all aside withered by his hot breath, spotted with venom. This heart-shock, while it lasts, is terrible indeed; but again those who have no strength to cast forth the serpent, bury him in fresh flowers, and lull him to a poisonous sleep in some secret fold of the heart, till he grows restless and fierce again.

With all her splendor Adeline Leicester was profoundly unhappy. The deep under current of her heart always swelled with bitter waters. Let the surface sparkle as it would, beneath it tears were constantly sleeping. There is no agony like that of a heart naturally pure and noble, which circumstance, weakness, or temptation has warped from its integrity. To know yourself possessed of noble powers, to appreciate all the sublimity of goodness, and yet feel that you have undermined your own strength, and cast a veil over the beautiful through which you can never see clearly, this is deep sorrow—this is the darkness and punishment of sin. Oh! if we could but

now how evil is punished in the heart of the evil doer, charity would indeed cover a multitude of sins. Adeline Leicester was unhappy. The pomp—the adulation which surrounded her had become a habit, thus all the zest and novelty of first possession was gone, and these things seemed but the necessary accessories of existence, without gratifying the hungry cry of her soul.

At this period of her life the thwarted affections and warm sympathies of her nature became clamorous for objects of love. Her whole being yearned over the blighted affections of other days; matured love grew strong within her. She absolutely panted to fold the child, abandoned in a delirium of passionate resentment, once more to her bosom. But that child could nowhere be found. Her parents too—that proud, kind old man, who had loved her so—that meek and loving woman—had the earth opened and swallowed them up, it would have left as many traces by which to discover them. The time had been when this proud woman shrunk from meeting persons so deeply injured—but oh! how fervently loved. Now she absolutely panted to fling herself at their feet, and crave forgiveness for all the shame and anguish her madness had cast upon them? In all this her exertions had been cruelly thwarted; parents, child, everything that had loved her and suffered for her, seemed swept into oblivion. The past was but a remembrance, not a wreck of it remained save in her own mind. Another feeling more powerful than filial or maternal love—more absorbing—more ruthlessly adhesive, was the love she could not conquer, for the hardened man who had been the first cause of all the misery and wrong against which she was struggling. It was the one passion of a life-time—the love of a warm, impulsive heart—of a vivid intellect, and, say what we will, this is a love that never changes—never dies. It may be perverted—it may be wrestled with and cast to the earth for a time; but such love once planted in a woman's bosom, burns there so long as a spark of life is left to feed its vitality; burns there, it may be, forever and ever, a blessing or a curse.

To Adeline Leicester it was a curse, for it outlived scorn. It crushed her self-respect—it fell like a mildew upon all the good resolutions that, about this time, began to spring up and brighten in her nature. You would not have supposed that proud, beautiful woman so humble in her love—her hopeless love—of a bad man, and that man the husband whom she had wronged! Yet so it was. Notwithstanding the past: notwithstanding all the perfidy and cruel scorn with which he had deliberately urged her on to ruin, she would have given up anything, everything for one expression of affection, such as had won the love of her young heart. But even here, where the accomplishment of her wish had proved a punishment, her affections were flung rudely back.

And now, when all her efforts were in vain, when nothing could be found to accept her penitence, or return some little portion of the yearning tenderness that filled her heart, she plunged recklessly into the world again—but the arrow was in her side. She folded her silken robes over it, and strove to feed her great want with the husks of fashionable life; but to

those who feel and think, the very attempt thus to appease the soul's hunger is a mockery. Adeline Leicester felt this, and at times she grew faint amid her empty splendor. She had met with none of the usual retributions which are the coarser and more common result of faults like hers. No disgrace clung to her name: she had wealth, beauty, position, homage. But who shall say that the punishment of her sin was not great even then? Still this was but the silver edging to the cloud that had begun to rise and darken over her life. Her own proud, warm heart was doomed to punish itself.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACOB STRONG was alone in Mr. Leicester's chamber. His master had gone out hurriedly, and left the room in considerable disarray. Papers were scattered about loose upon the table. The small traveling desk which usually stood upon it was open, and on the purple lining lay an open letter, bearing a Southern post-mark, that had evidently arrived by the morning mail.

We do not pretend to justify our friend Jacob, though he is an especial favorite, in the course he pursued on that occasion. His reasons may possibly be deemed justifiable by the reader, but in our minds there still rests a doubt. Be this as it may, Jacob did take up the open letter and glance hurriedly over its contents: then he read it more deliberately, while a new and singular expression stole over his features. This did not seem quite sufficient gratification of his curiosity, for he even opened a compartment of the desk, and pursued his research among notes, visiting cards, bills and business papers for a good half hour, dotting down a hasty memorandum now and then with a gold and amethyst pen which he took from Leicester's inkstand. Then he read the open letter a third time, muttering over the words as if anxious to fix them on his mind by the additional aid of sound.

"That will do—that will clinch the matter; he will never let this escape!" he said, at last, re-placing the letter. "Cautious, subtle as he is, this temptation will be too strong. Then, then——"

Jacob's eyes flashed, he pressed the knuckles of one large hand hard upon the desk, and firmly shut his teeth.

That moment a stealthy tread was heard near the door. Jacob instantly commenced making a terrible noise and confusion among the chairs, and while he was occupied in setting things right after his awkward fashion, Leicester glided into the chamber. Remembering the letter, he had hurried back to secure it from the possible curiosity of his servant. But Jacob was busy with the furniture, muttering his discontent against the untidy chamber-maid, and seemed so completely occupied with an old silk handkerchief which he was flourishing from one object to another, that all suspicion forsook Leicester. He quietly closed the desk, therefore, and placing the letter in his pocket, sunk to an easy chair which Jacob had just left clouded in a dusky haze, while he commenced operations on a neighboring sofa.

Something more exciting than usual must have

occupied Leicester's thoughts, or, with his fastidious habits, he would not for a moment have endured the perpetual clouds of dust that floated over his hair and clothes, whenever Jacob discovered a new object upon which to exercise his handkerchief. As it was, he sat lost in thought, apparently quite unconscious of the annoyance, or of the keen glances which the servant now and then cast upon him.

"It will do," thought Jacob, gathering the duster up in his hand with an eager clutch, and while he seemed looking around for something to employ himself upon, those keen, grey eyes were bent upon Leicester's face. "I was sure of it, he has almost made up his mind. Let me hear the tone of his voice, and I shall know how!"

Jacob had not long to wait. After a reverie that was disturbed by many an anxious thought, Leicester turned in his chair, opened the little travelling desk and began to write, pausing now and then as if the construction of his language was more than usually difficult. The note did not please him. He tore it in two, and, casting the fragments upon the hearth-rug, selected another sheet from the perfumed paper that lay at his elbow. This time he was more successful. The note was carefully folded, sealed with a little antique seal, and directed in a light and flowing hand. Leicester smiled as he wrote, and his face brightened as if he had flung off a load of annoying doubts. "Here," he said, holding the letter over his shoulder with a carelessness that was certainly more than half assumed, "take this note and observe how it is received. You understand?"

Jacob took the snowy little billet and bent over it wistfully, as if the direction could only be made out with great effort.

"Well!" said Leicester, turning sharply upon him, "what keeps you? Surely you understand enough to make out the address?"

"Well, yes!" answered Jacob, holding the note at arm's length, and eyeing it askance, "it's rather too fine that ere hand-writing, but then I can manage to cipher it out if you give me time enough."

"Very well, you have had time enough. Go! and remember to observe all that passes when you deliver it."

Jacob took up his drab beaver, planted it firmly on the back of his head and disappeared, holding the note between his thumb and finger.

While our friend Jacob is making his way up town, we will precede him and enter the pretty cottage, which, with its fairy garden, has before been an object of description.

In the parlor of this exquisite but monotonous dwelling sat Florence Nelson. Cold as it was becoming she still wore the pretty morning dress of fine India muslin, with its profusion of soft lace, but over it was a scarf of scarlet cashmere, that gave to her cheek its rosy shadow, as a crimson camilla sometimes casts a trace of its presence on the marble urn against which it falls. But for this waving shadow her face was cold, white, and even traced with mournful lines, as if she had been suffering from illness or some grief unnatural to her youth, and weighing sadly upon her gentle nature. Her soft, brown eyes seemed misty

and dull by habitual tears, and the long, curling lashes seemed to have flung a deeper and deeper shadow on the cheek just beneath, for a faint circle, such as disease or grief often pencils, was becoming definitely marked around those sad and beautiful eyes. The imprint of many a heavy heart-ache might have been read in those shadowy circles; and the paler redness of a mouth that smiled still—but oh, how mournfully.

Florence sat by a sofa-table, one foot, too small now for the satin slipper that had so beautifully defined its proportions a little while before, rested upon one of the richly carved supporters. She had become painfully fragile, and the folds of her dress fell around her drooping form like a cloud, soft, white, and so transparent that but for the red scarf you might have defined the slender arms and marble neck underneath with startling distinctness. She was occupied with her drawing lesson, but even the pencil seemed too heavy for the slender and waxen fingers that guided it; and to one that understood the signification, there was something ominous in the bright, feverish tinge that spread over her palm, as if she had been crushing roses in that little hand, and might not hope to wash the stain away.

Robert Otis leaned over the unhappy girl. He too was changed, but not like her. The flesh had not wasted from his limbs; the fire of youth had not burned out prematurely in those bright eyes; but his look was unsettled, restless, nay, sometimes wild. His very smile was hurried and passed quickly away, all its soft, mellow warmth was gone. The change was different, but terribly perceptible both in the youth and the young girl.

It was no boyish passion which marked every feature of that noble face as it bent lower and lower over the drooping girl. Tenderness, keen, deep sympathy was there, but none of the ardent passions that had fired his whole being when only the semblance of that beautiful form first met his eye. If Robert Otis loved Florence Nelson, it was with the tender earnestness of manhood, not with the fiery ardor natural to his age and temperament.

"You seem tired; how your hand trembles; rest awhile, Miss Nelson. This stooping posture must be oppressive," said Robert, gently attempting to remove the pencil from the fair hand that could really guide it no longer.

"No, no," said Florence, raising her eyes with a soft, sad smile, "you do not give lessons every day now, and we must improve the time. When Mr. Leicester comes he should find me quite an artist, I must not disgrace you with my idleness. He would feel hurt if we did not meet his expectations. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps, I cannot exactly tell. Mr. Leicester is so unlike other men, it is difficult to decide what his wishes really are," said Robert. "He certainly did take great interest in your progress at first!"

"And now that interest has ceased! Is that what you mean to say, Robert?" questioned the young girl, and even the scarlet reflection of her shawl failed to relieve the deadly paleness of her countenance.

"No, I did not say that!" answered Robert, gently, "he questions me of your progress often."

Florence drew a deep breath, and now there was something more than a scarlet reflection on her cheek.

"But then," continued Robert, "he contents himself with questions; he does not come to witness the progress your are making."

"Then you have noticed it?—you have thought it strange?" said Florence, while the red upon her cheek began to burn painfully, and tears rushed to her eyes. "Yet you do not know—you cannot even guess how hard this is to bear!"

"Perhaps I can guess," answered Robert, casting down his eyes and trembling visibly.

Florence started from her chair and stood upright. In the violence of her agitation, she lost the languid, willowy stoop of frame that had become habitual. For a moment the full energies of her nature were lighted up, stung into sharp vitality by surprise and terror. But she did not speak, she only stood upright a single moment, and then sunk to the couch helplessly and sobbing like a child. Robert knelt by her greatly agitated, for he had anticipated no such violent effect from his words.

"Do not weep, Miss Nelson, I did not intend to pain you thus. What have I said?—what have I done that it should bring so much grief?"

She looked at him earnestly, and whispered in a low voice, while the lashes fell over her eyes sweeping the tears downward in fresh gushes. "What was it that you said? Something that you could guess, was not that it? Now tell me all you guess. What is it that you think?"

"Nothing that should overwhelm you in this manner," said Robert, struggling against the convulsions her agitation was calculated to produce. "I thought—I have long thought—that you were greatly attached to Mr. Leicester, more than a ward usually is to her guardian."

"And so, you are with him so much—and surely you did not think that my love—for I do not deny it, Robert—was unwelcome or unsought?"

Robert hesitated, he could not find it in his heart to give utterance to his thoughts.

"No, I did not think that," he said; "but Mr. Leicester is a strange man, so much older than we are, so much wiser. I can fathom neither his motives nor his feelings."

"And I—I have felt this so often—that is, of late," said Florence, "at times I am almost afraid of him, and yet this very fear has its fascination."

"Yes," answered Robert, thoughtless of the meaning that might be given to his words, "the bird shivers with fear even as the serpent lures it, and in this lies some subtle mystery, for while the poor thing seems to know its danger, the knowledge yields it no power of resistance. Here lies the serpent with its eyes burning and its jaws apart, exposing all its venom; but the spell works in spite of this."

"Hush! hush!" said Florence, with a look of terror, "this is a cruel comparison. It makes me shudder!"

"I did not intend it as a comparison," answered Robert. "With you it can never be one, and with me such ideas would be very ungrateful, applied to my oldest friend. I wish to Heaven no thought against him would ever enter my head again."

"Conquer them, never breathe them again!" said Florence, with sudden impetuosity. "They have killed me—those weary, base suspicions—not mine! not mine! Oh! I am so thankful that they were not formed in my heart!—they were whispered to me—forced on me. I would not believe them, but the evil thing is here. I have no strength to cast it out alone, and he never comes to help me."

"Perhaps he does not know how deeply you feel for him?" said Robert, anxious to console her.

Florence shook her head, and leaning forward, shrouded her eyes with one hand; after a little while she turned her gaze upon Robert and addressed him more quietly.

"You must not think ill of him," she said, with a dim smile. "See what suspicion and pining thoughts can do, when they have crept into the heart." The poor girl drew up the muslin sleeve from her arm, and Robert was startled to see how greatly the delicate limb was attenuated; tears came into his eyes, and bending down he touched the snowy wrist with his lips. "I must tell him that you are ill—that you suffer—surely, he cannot dream of this!"

"Not yet, we must not importune him; besides, I am becoming used to this desolate feeling. You will come oftener now. It is something to know that he has been near you—touched your clothes—held your hand—the atmosphere of his presence hangs about your very garments and does me good. This seems childish, does it not? but it is love. Sometime, when you have given up your being to another, this will seem less strange."

"I might have loved, young as you think me, even as you love this man," said Robert, annoyed, spite of his sympathy, by the words with which she had unconsciously applied to his youth; "but that which has wounded you saved me. You do not know, Miss Nelson, all that I have felt since the evening when Mr. Leicester brought me here. What I saw that night awoke me from the first sweet dream of passion. I could have loved you then, even as you love Mr. Leicester."

"Me!" said Florence, and a momentary smile lighted her eyes—as if the very thought of his young love amused her, sad as she was; "how strange! to me you seemed so young and embarrassed—a mere boy—now—"

"Now I am changed, you would say—now I am a different person—older, firmer, more self-possessed. Yet it is only a few months ago; I may seem older and less timid, for in this little time I have thought and suffered, but then I was more worthy of your love for I had not learned to distrust my oldest friend. Like you I have struggled against suspicion, and like you I have failed to cast it forth. It has withered your gentle nature—mine it has embittered."

"Ah! but you had not my temptation. It was not his own mother who poisoned your mind against him."

"His mother? I did not know that either of his parents were living."

"But she, this quiet, cold lady; the woman whom you have seen here. Did he never tell you that she was his mother?"

"He never even hinted it!" said Robert, greatly surprised.

"She told me so with her own lips: she warned me against him—she, his mother."

"Indeed!" said Robert, thoughtfully. "Yet with what coldness he received her!"

"It is not his nature," answered Florence, and her eyes filled with grateful tears. "To me her kindness has been unvaried; there is something almost holy in her calm, sweet nature: but for this I had not been so unhappy. Had I detected prejudice, temper, anything selfish mingled with her words, they would never have reached my heart, but now I cannot turn from her. With all her stately coldness she has something

of his power—I dare not doubt her. But I dare not believe the warning that she gave me."

Robert walked up and down the room. New and stern thoughts were making their way in his mind. Gratitude is a powerful feeling, but it possesses none of the infatuation and blindness which characterizes the grand passion. Suspicions that had haunted his conscience like crimes were beginning to shape themselves into stubborn facts. Still he would not yield to them. Like the gentle girl drooping before his eyes, he dared not believe anything against Edward Leicester. Humiliation, nay, almost ruin, lay in the thought.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1849, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 195.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLORENCE had taken up her pencil again, but still remained inactive, gazing wistfully through the lace curtains, through which might be seen the little fountain flinging up a shower of spray amid flowers gorgeous with autumn tints and the crisp brown that had settled on the little grass plot. Notwithstanding the dahlias were in a glow of rich tints, and the chrysanthemums sheeted with snow white, rosy, and golden blossoms, there was a tinge of decay upon the leaves, very beautiful, but always productive of mournful feelings. Florence had felt this influence more than usual that morning, and now with her excited nerves there was something in the glow of those flowers, and the soft rush of water-drops, that made her heart sink. If the autumn and summer had been so dreary with all the warmth and brightness of sunshine and blossoms, what had the winter of promise to her? Spite of herself she looked down to the thin, white hand that lay so listlessly on the paper, and gazed on it till tears swelled once more against those half closed eyelids. "How desolate to be buried in the winter, and away from all——" These were the thoughts that rose and swelled in that young heart, and the objects that gave rise to them were flowers, autumn flowers, the richest and most beautiful things on earth. Thus it often happens in life, that lovely objects awake our most painful and bitter feelings, either by a mocking contrast with the sorrow that is within us, or because they are associated with the memory of wasted happiness.

As Florence sat gazing upon the half veiled splendor of the garden flowers, she saw a man open the little gate, and move with a slow, heavy step toward the door. The face was unfamiliar, and the fact of any strange person seeking that dwelling was rare enough to excite some nervous trepidation in a young and fragile creature like Florence.

"There is some one coming," she said, with a tone and look of alarm quite disproportioned to the occasion, addressing Robert, who was thoughtfully pacing the room. "Will you go to the door, I believe every one is out except us?"

Robert shook off the train of thought that had made him unconscious of the heavy footsteps now plainly heard in the veranda, and went to the door.

Jacob Strong did not seem in the least embarrassed, though nothing could be supposed further from his thoughts than an encounter with the young man in that place. Perhaps he lost something of the abrupt-

ness unconsciously assumed during his walk, for his mien instantly assumed a loose, almost slouching carelessness, such as had always characterized it in the presence of Leicester or his protegee.

"Well, how do you do, Mr. Otis? I didn't just expect to find you here! Hain't got much to do down at the store, I reckon?"

"Never mind that, Mr. Strong," answered the youth, good humoredly, "but tell me what brought you here. Some message from Mr. Leicester, ha?"

"Well, now you do beat all at guessing," answered Jacob, drawing forth the billet doux with which he was charged. "Ain't there a young gal a living here, Miss Flo— Florence Nelson? If that ain't the name I can't cipher it out any how!"

"Yes, that is the name—Miss Nelson does live here," said Robert. "Give me the note, I will deliver it!"

"Not as you know on, Mr. Otis," replied Jacob, with a look of shrewd determination. "Mr. Leicester told me to give this ere little concern into the gal's own hand, and I always obey orders though I break owners. Jest be kind enough to show me where the young critter is, and I'll do my arrand in less than no time and back agin!"

"Very well, come this way, Miss Nelson will receive the note herself."

Florence was standing near the window, her bright, eager eyes were turned upon the door, she had overheard Leicester's name, and it had thrilled through every nerve of her body.

Jacob entered with his usual heavy indifference. He looked a moment at the young girl, and then held out the note—Robert fancied that a shade of feeling swept over that usually composed face, but the lace curtains were waving softly to a current of air let in through the open doors, and it might be the transient shadows thus flung upon his face. Still there was something keen and intelligent in the glance with which Jacob regarded the young girl while she bent over the note. Suddenly he turned those keen, grey eyes, now full of meaning, and almost stern in their searching power, upon the youth himself. Robert grew restless beneath that stern scrutiny, the color mounted to his forehead, and as a relief he turned toward Florence. She was busy reading the note, apparently unconscious of the person, but oh! how wildly beautiful her face had become. Her eyes absolutely sparkled through the drooping lashes; her small mouth was parted in a glowing smile—you could see the pearly edges of her teeth behind the

bright red of lips that seemed just bathed in wine. She was trembling from head to foot, not violently, but a blissful shiver like that which stirs a leaf at noonday in the calm summer time, wandered joyously over her delicate frame. Twice, three times she read the note, and then her soft eyes were uplifted and turned upon Robert in all their glorious joy.

"See," she said, and her voice was one burst of melody—"oh! what ingrates we have been to doubt him!" In her bright triumph she held forth the note, but as Robert advanced to receive it she drew back. "I had forgotten," she said, "I alone was to know it, but you can guess—you can see how happy it has made me."

Robert Otis turned away somewhat annoyed by this half confidence. Florence, without heeding this, sat down by the table, and, with the open note before her, prepared to write, but her excitement was too eager, her hand too unsteady, after several vain efforts she took the note and ran up stairs.

Thus Jacob and Robert were left alone together. The youth, occupied with his own thoughts, seemed quite unconscious of the companionship forced upon him. He sat down on the couch which Florence had occupied, and, leaning upon the table, supported his forehead with one hand. Jacob stood in his old place regarding the varied expressions that came and went on that young face. His own rude features were greatly disturbed, and at this moment bore a look that approached to anguish. Twice he moved his person as if to approach Robert, and then fell back irresolute, at last he strode forward, and before the youth was aware of the movement, a hand lay heavily upon his shoulder.

"So you love her, my boy?"

Robert started. The drawling tone, the rude down East enunciation was gone. The man who stood before him seemed to have changed his identity. Rude and uncouth he certainly was, but even in this there was something imposing. Robert looked at him with parted lips and wondering eyes, there was something even of awe in his astonishment.

"Tell me, boy," continued Jacob, and his voice was full of tenderness—"tell me, is it love for this girl that makes you thoughtful? Are you jealous of Edward Leicester?"

Robert, lost all presence of mind, he did not answer, but sat motionless with his eyes turned upon the changed face bending close to his.

"Will you not speak to me, Robert Otis? You may, you should, for I am an honest man."

"I believe you are!" said Robert, starting up and reaching forth his hand, "I know that you are, for my heart leaps toward you. What was the question you put, I will answer it now? Did you ask if I loved Florence Nelson?"

"Yes, that was it, I would know, otherwise events may shape themselves unluckily. I trust, Robert, that in this you have escaped the snare."

"I do not understand you, but can answer your question a great deal better than I could have done three days ago. I do love Miss Nelson as it has always seemed to me that I should love a sister had one been made an orphan with me: I would do any

thing for her, sacrifice anything for her. Once I thought this love, but now I know better. Was there not another question, am I not jealous of Edward Leicester? I do not know, my heart sinks when I see them together—I cannot force myself to wish her his wife, and yet this repugnance is unaccountable to myself. He is my friend—she something even dearer than a sister, but my very soul revolts at the thought of their union. It was this that made me thoughtful: I do not love Florence in your meaning of the word: I am not jealous of Mr. Leicester, but God forgive me! there is something in my heart that rises up against him! There, sir, you have my confidence—I may be imprudent—I may be wrong, but it cannot be helped now."

"You have been neither imprudent nor wrong," answered Jacob, laying his hand on the bent head of the youth. "I am a plain man, but you will find in me a safer counsellor than you imagine, a wiser one—though not more sincere—than your good aunt."

"Then you know my aunt?" cried Robert, profoundly astonished.

"It would have been well had you confided even in her on Thanksgiving night, when you were so near confessing the difficulties that seem so terrible to you. A few words then might have relieved all your troubles."

"Then Mr. Leicester has told you—has betrayed me to—to his servant, I would not have believed it!" Robert grew pale as he spoke: there was shame and terror in his face: deep bitterness in his tone, that moment he was suffering the keen pangs which a first proof of treachery brings to youth.

"No, you wrong Mr. Leicester there, he has not betrayed you, never will, probably, nor do I know the exact nature of your anxieties."

"But who are you then? An hour ago I could have answered this question, or thought so. Now you bewilder me, I can scarcely recognize any look or tone about you—which is the artificial, which the real?"

"Both are real—I *was* what you have hitherto seen me years ago. I *am* what you see now, but I can at will throw off the present and identify myself with the past. You see, Robert Otis, I give confidence when I ask it—a breath of what you have seen or heard to-day repeated to Mr. Leicester would send me from his service. But I do not fear to trust you!"

"There is no cause of fear, I never betrayed any thing in my life—only convince me that you mean no evil to him."

"I only mean to prevent evil! and I will!"

"All this perplexes me," said Robert, raising one hand to his forehead—"I seem to have known you many years; my heart warms toward you as it never did to any one but my aunt."

"That is right, an honest heart seldom betrays itself. But hush, the young lady is coming, God help her, for she loves that man."

"It is worship, idolatry, not love; that seems but a feeble word, it gives one a heart-ache to witness its ravages on her sweet person."

"And does she feel so much?" said Jacob, with emotion.

Before Robert could answer, the light step of

Florence was heard on the stairs; when she entered the room Jacob stood near the door, holding his hat awkwardly between both hands, and with his eyes bent upon the floor.

"You will give this to Mr. Leicester," she said, still radiant and beautiful with happiness, placing a note in Jacob's hand—"here is something for yourself, I only wish it could make you as happy as—as—that it may be of use, I mean." Blushing and hesitating thus in her speech, she placed a small gold coin upon the note. Poor girl, it was a pocket-piece given by her father, but in her wild gratitude she would have cast thousands upon the man whose coming had brought so much happiness.

Jacob received the coin, looked at her earnestly for a moment, half extended his hand, and then thrust it into his pocket.

"Thank you, marm, a thousand times—I will do the errand right off!" and putting on his hat Jacob strode from the house, muttering as he cast a hurried glance around the little garden—"it seems like shooting a robin on her nest—I must think it all over again."

Robert would have followed Jacob Strong, for his mind was in tumult, and he panted for some more perfect elucidation of the mystery that surrounded this singular man. But Florence laid her hand gently on his arm, and drew him into the window recess: her face was bright with smiles and bathed in blushes. "You were ready to go without wishing me joy," she said, "and yet you must have guessed what was in that precious, precious note!"

Robert felt a strange thrill creep through his frame. He turned his eyes from the soft orbs looking into his, for their brilliancy pained him.

"No," he said, almost bitterly, "I cannot guess—perhaps I do not care to guess!"

"Oh! Robert, you do not know what happiness is: no human being ever was so happy before. How cold—how calm you are. You could feel for me when I was miserable, but now, now it is wrong: he charged me to keep it secret, but my heart is so full, Robert; stoop and let me whisper it—tell nobody, he would be very angry—but this week we are to be married!"

"Now," said Robert, drawing a deep breath, and speaking in a voice so calm that it seemed like prophecy—"now I feel for you more than ever."

The little, eager hand fell from his arm, and in a voice that thrilled with disappointment, Florence said, "Then you will not wish me joy?"

Robert took her hand, grasped it a moment in his, and flinging aside the cloud of lace that had fallen over them, left the room. Florence followed him with her eyes, and while he was in sight a shade of sadness hung upon her sweet face—but her happiness was too perfect even for this little shadow to visit it more than a moment. She sunk upon an ottoman in the recess, and, with her eyes fixed upon the autumn flowers without, subsided into a reverie, the sweetest, the brightest that ever fell upon a youthful heart.

CHAPTER XV.

PEN, ink and paper lay upon the table. The curtains were flung back, admitting the broad sunshine

that revealed more clearly than the usual soft twilight with which Leicester was in the habit of enveloping himself, the strong lines which time and passion, sometimes allowed to run wild, sometimes curbed with an iron will, had left on his handsome features. Papers were on the table, not letters, but scraps that bore a business aspect, some half printed, others without signature, but still in legal form as notes of hand are given.

Leicester took one of these checks—a printed blank, and gazed on it some moments with a fixed and thoughtful glance. He laid it gently down, took up a pen, and held the drop of ink on its point up to the light, as if even the color were an object of interest. He wrote a word or two, merely filling up the blank before him, but simple as this seemed, that hand, usually firm as marble, quivered on the paper, imperceptibly it is true, but enough to render the words unsteady. His face, too, was fiercely pale, if I may use the term, for there was something in the expression of those features that sent a sort of hard glow through their whiteness. It was the glow of a desperate will mastering fear. With a quick and scornful quiver of the lip he tore the half filled check in twain, and cast the fragments into the fire. "Am I growing old?" he said, aloud, "or is this pure cowardice? Fear, what have I to fear?" he continued, hushing his voice. "It cannot be brought back to me, a chain that has grown link by link for years will not break with any common wrench. Still if it could be avoided, the lad's loves me!—well, and have not others loved me?—of what use is affection if it adds nothing to one's enjoyments? If the old planter had left my pretty Florence the property at once, why then—but till she is of age, that is almost two years—till she is of age we must live."

Half in thought, half in words, these ideas passed through the brain and upon the lip of Edward Leicester. When his mind was once made up to the performance of an act, it seldom paused even to excuse a sin to his own soul, but this was not exactly a question of right and wrong: that had been too often decided with his conscience to admit of the least hesitation. There was peril in the act he meditated, peril to himself, this it was that made his brow pale, and his hand unsteady. During a whole life of fraud and evil doing, he had never once placed himself within the grasp of the law. His instruments, less guilty, and far less treacherous than himself, had often suffered for crimes that his keen intellect had suggested. For years he had entirely lived upon the fruit of iniquities prompted by himself, but with which no personal connection could ever be proved. Now his subtle forethought in selecting and training an agent who should bear the responsibility of crime while he reaped the benefit, had failed. The time had arrived when Robert Otis was, if ever, to become useful to his teacher. But evil fruit in that warm, generous nature had been slow in ripening. With all his subtle craft Leicester dared not propose the fraud which was to supply him with means for two years' residence in Europe.

There was something in the boy too clear-sighted and prompt even for his wily influence, and now

after years of training worthy of Lucifer himself, Leicester, for the first time, found his chosen instrument fail. Robert might be deluded into wrong—might innocently become his victim, but Leicester despaired of making him, with his bright intellect and honorable impulses, the principal or accomplice of an act such as he meditated.

A decanter of brandy stood upon the table, Leicester filled a goblet and half drained it. This in no way disturbed the pallor of his countenance, but his hand grew firm, and he filled up several of the printed checks with a rapidity that betrayed the misgivings that still beset him.

He examined the papers attentively after they were written, and, selecting one, laid it in an embroidered letter-case which he took from his bosom, the others he placed in an old copy-book that had been lying open before him all the time: it was the same book that Robert Otis had taken so stealthily from his aunt's stand-drawer on Thanksgiving night.

When these arrangements were finished, Leicester drew out his watch, and seemed to be waiting for some one that he expected.

Again he opened the copy-book and compared the checks with other papers it contained. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy him, for a smile gleamed in his eyes as he closed the book.

Just then Robert Otis came in. His step had become quiet, and the rosy buoyancy of look and manner that had been so interesting a few months before, was entirely gone. There was restraint, nay, something amounting almost to dislike in his air as he drew a seat to the table.

"You are looking pale, Robert; has anything gone amiss at the counting-house?" said Leicester, regarding his visitor with interest.

"Nothing!"

"Are you ill then?"

"No, I am well—quite well!"

"But something distresses you, those shadows about the eye, the rigid lines, about that mouth—there is trouble beneath them. Tell me what it is—am I not your friend?"

Robert smiled a meaning, bitter smile, that seemed strangely unnatural on those fresh lips. Leicester read the meaning of that silent reproach, and it warned him to be careful.

"Surely," he said "you have not been at F—street without your friend?—you have not indulged in high play, and no prudent person to guide you?"

"No!" said Robert, with bitter energy, "that once—that night I did play, how, why, it is impossible for me to remember. Those few hours of wild sin were enough, they have stained my soul—they have plunged me in debt—they have made me ashamed to look a good man in the face."

"But I warned, I cautioned you!"

Robert did not answer, but by the gleam of his eyes and the quiver of his lips, you could see that words of fire were smothered in his heart.

"You would have plunged into the game deeper and deeper but for me."

"Perhaps I should, it was a wild dream—I was mad—the very memory almost makes me insane.

I, so young, so cherished, in debt, and how—to what amount?"

"Enough—I am afraid," said Leicester, gently—"enough to cover that pretty farm, and all the bank stock your nice old aunt has scraped together. But what of that?—she is in no way responsible, and gambling debts are only debts of honor, no law reaches them!"

"I will not make sin the shelter of meanness," answered the youth, with a wild flash of feeling—"these men may be villains, but they did not force themselves upon me. I sought them of my own free choice; no, I cannot say that either, for Heaven knows I never wished to enter that den!"

"It was I that invited, nay, urged you!"

"Else I had never been there!"

"But I intended it as a warning—I cautioned you, pleaded with you."

"Yes, I remember, you said that I was ignorant, awkward, a novice—Mr. Leicester, your advice was like a jeer—your caution a taunt, your words and manner were at variance; I played that night, but not of my own free will. I say to you, it was *not* of my own free will!"

"Is it me upon whom your words reflect?" said said Leicester, with every appearance of wounded feeling. Robert was silent.

"Do you know," continued Leicester, in that deep, musical tone, that was sure to make the heart thrill—"do you know, Robert Otis, why it is that you have not been openly exposed?—why this debt has not been demanded long ago?"

"Because the note which I gave is not yet due!"

"The note—a minor's note—what man in his senses would receive a thing so worthless? No, Robert, it was my endorsement that made the paper valuable. It is from me, your old friend, Robert, that the money must come to meet the paper at its maturity."

Tears gushed into the young man's eyes, he held out his hand across the table, Leicester took the hand and pressed it very gently.

"You know," he said, "this note becomes due almost immediately."

"I know—I know. It seems to me that every day has left a mark on my heart; oh! Mr. Leicester, how I have suffered!"

"I will not say that suffering is the inevitable consequence of a wrong act, because that just now would be unkind," said Leicester, with a soft smile, "but hereafter you must try and remember that it is so."

Robert looked upon his friend: his large eyes dilated: and his lips began to tremble, you could see that his heart was smitten to the core. How he had wronged that man! tears of generous compunction rushed to his eyes.

"It will be rather difficult, but I have kept this thing in my mind," said Leicester. "To-morrow I shall draw a large sum, a portion must redeem your debt, but on condition that you never play again!"

Robert shuddered. "Play again!" he said, and tears gushed through the fingers which he had pressed to his eyes, "would you fear that a man who has been racked, would of his own free will seek the wheel again: but how am I to repay you?"

"Confide in me, trust me. Oh! Robert, the suspicion that were in your heart but an hour since, they will return."

Robert shook his head, and swept the tears from his eyes.

"No, no! even then I hated myself for them: now, oh! how good, how forgiving, how generous you are—I am young, strong, have energy. In time this shameful debt can be paid—but kindness like this—how can I ever return that?"

"Oh! opportunities for gratitude are never wanting: the bird we tend gives back music in return for care, yet what can be more feeble? Give me love, Robert, that is the music of a young heart—do not distrust me again!"

"I never will!"

Leicester wrung the youth's hand. They both arose.

"If you are going to the counting-room I will accompany you," he said; "my business must be negotiated with your firm."

"I was first going to my room," said Robert.

"No matter, I will walk slowly—by the way, here is your old copy-book, I have just been examining it. Those were pleasant evenings, my boy, when I taught you how to use the pen."

"Yes," said Robert, receiving the book, "my dear aunt claims the old copies as a sort of heirloom. I remembered your wish to see it, and so took it quietly away, I really think she would not have given it up even to you."

"Then she did not know when you took it away?"

"No, I had forgotten it, and so stole down in the night. She was sound asleep, and I came away very early in the morning."

"Dear old lady," said Leicester, smiling, "you must return her treasure before it is missed; stay, fold your cloak over it. I shall see you again directly."

Leicester's bed-chamber communicated with another small room, which was used as a dressing-closet. From some caprice he had draped the entrance with silken curtains such as clouded the windows; scarcely had he left the room when this drapery was flung aside, revealing the door which had evidently stood open during his interview with Robert Otis. Jacob Strong closed the door very softly, but in evident haste, dropped the curtains over it, and taking a key from his pocket, let himself out of the bed-chamber. He overtook Robert Otis a few paces from the hotel, and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Mr. Otis, that copy-book, my master wishes to see it again—will you send it back?"

"Certainly," answered Robert, producing the book.

"But what on earth can he want it for?"

"Come back with me, and I will tell you!"

"I will," said Robert; "but remember, friend, no more hints against Mr. Leicester, I cannot listen to them."

"I don't intend to hint anything against him now!" said Jacob, drily, and they entered the hotel together.

Jacob took the young man to his own little room, and the two were locked in together more than an hour: when the door opened Jacob appeared composed and awkward as ever, but a powerful change had come upon the youth. His face was not only

pale, but a look of wild horror disturbed his countenance.

"Yet I will not believe it," he said, "it is too fiendish. In what have I ever harmed him?"

"I do not ask you to believe, but to know. Keep out of the way a single week, it can do harm to no one."

"But in less than a week this miserable debt must be paid!"

"Then pay it!"

Robert smiled bitterly.

"How? by ruining my aunt? Shall I ask her to sell the old homestead?"

"She would do it—she would give up the last penny rather than see you disgraced, Robert Otis!"

"How can you know this?"

"I do know it, but this is not the question. Here is money to pay your debt, I have kept it in my pocket for weeks."

Robert did not reach forth his hand to receive the roll of bank-notes held toward him, for surprise held him motionless.

"Take the money, it is the exact sum," said Jacob, in a voice that carried authority with it. "I ask no promise that you never enter another gambling hall, you never will!"

"Never!" said Robert, receiving the money; "but how—why have you done this?"

"Ask me no questions now, by-and-bye you will know all about it, the money is mine. I have earned it honestly; as much more is all that I have in the world. No thanks! I never could bear them, besides it will be re-paid in time!"

"If I live," said Robert, with tears in his eyes.

"This week, remember—this week you must be absent. A visit to the old homestead, anything that will take you out of town."

"I will go," said Robert, "it can certainly do no harm."

And they parted.

Adeline Leicester fled from the keen disappointment which almost crushed her for a time, and sought to drown all thought in the whirl of fashionable life. Her reception evenings were splendid. Beauty, talent, wit, everything that could charm or dazzle gathered beneath her roof. She gave herself no time for grief, occasionally a thought of her husband would sting her into fresh bursts of excitement—sometimes the memory of her parents and her child passed over her heart, leaving a swell behind like that which followed the angels when they went down to trouble the still waters. Her wit grew more sparkling, her graceful sarcasm keener than it had ever been. She was the rage that season, and exhausted her rich talent in efforts to win excitement. She did not hope for happiness from the homage and splendor that her beauty and wealth had secured.

When all other devices for amusement failed to keep up the fever of her artificial life, she bethought her of a new project. Her talent, her wealth must achieve something more brilliant than had yet been dreamed of, she would give a fancy ball.

At first Adeline thought of this ball only as something that should pass like a rocket through the upper

as the thought grew upon her, she resolved to make this an epoch in her own inner life; the man whom she had loved, the husband who had so coldly trampled her to the earth in her seeming poverty—he should witness this grand gala—he should see her in the full blaze of her splendid career. There was something of proud retaliation in this: she fancied that it was resentful hate that prompted this desire to see and triumph over the man who had scorned her. Alas! poor woman, was there no lurking hope?—no feeling that she dared not call by its right name in all that wild excitement?

She sent for Jacob, and besought him to devise some means by which Leicester should be won to attend her ball, without suspecting her identity.

"Let it be superb—let it surpass everything hitherto known in elegance," she said, "he shall be here—he shall see the poor governess, the scorned wife in a new phase."

There was triumph in her eyes as she spoke.

"You love this man, even now in spite of all he has done?" said Jacob Strong, who stood before her while she spoke.

"No," she answered—"no, I hate—oh! how I do hate him!"

Jacob regarded her with a steady, fixed glance of the eye, he was afraid to believe her. He would not have believed her but for the powerful wish that gave an unnatural impulse to his faith.

"He may be dazzled by all this splendor—the knowledge of so much wealth will make him humble—he will be your slave again!"

Adeline glanced around the sumptuous array of her boudoir. Her eyes sparkled: her lip quivered with haughty triumph.

"And I would spurn him even as he spurned me in that humble room overhead, that room filled with its wealth of old memories."

Jacob turned away to hide the joy that burned in his eyes.

"Oh! my mistress, say it again. In earnest truth you hate this man—do not deceive yourself—do not deceive me. Have you unwound the adder from your heart? Did that night do its work?"

Adeline Leicester paused; she was ashamed to own even before that devoted servant, how closely the adder still folded himself in her bosom. She turned pale as death, but still answered with unfaltering voice, "Jacob, I hate him!"

"Not yet—not as you ought to hate him," answered Jacob, regarding her pallid face so searchingly that his own cheek whitened, "but when you see him in all his villainy, as I have seen him, when you know all!"

"And do I not know all—what is it you keep from me? Yet what can I learn more vile, more terrible than the past?"

"What if I tell you that within a month, Edward Leicester, your husband, will be married to another woman!"

"Married! married to another!—Leicester—my—" she broke off, for her white lips refused to utter another syllable. After a momentary struggle she started up—"does he think that I am dead?—does he hope that night had killed me?"

"He knows that you are living; but thinks you have returned to England."

"But this is crime—punishable crime."

"I know that it is."

A faint, incredulous smile stole over her lips, and she waved her hand, "he will not violate the law, never was a bad man more prudent."

"He will be married to-morrow night."

"And to that girl! why, does he love her so much? Has she beauty so overpowering? What has she to tempt Leicester into the crime?"

"Her father is dead. By his will a large property falls to this poor girl. The letter came under cover to Leicester: he opened it. After the marriage they will sail for the north of Europe—there the letter will follow them, telling the poor orphan of her father's death. How can she guess that her husband has seen it before!"

"But I—I am not dead?"

"But you love him, he knows that better than you do. Death is no stronger safe-guard than that knowledge. In your love or in your death he is equally safe."

"God help me, this is the truth, but I will not be a slave to this love forever. If this last treachery be true, my soul will loathe him as he deserves."

"It is true."

"But my ball is to-morrow night. He accepted the invitation. You are certain that he will come?"

"He accepted the invitation eagerly enough," said Jacob, drily; "but what then?"

"Why, to-morrow night—this cannot happen before to-morrow night—then I shall see him; after that—no, no, he dare not. You see, Jacob, it is in order to save him from deeper crime—and we must not sit still and allow this poor girl to be sacrificed—that would be terrible. It shall be prevented."

"Nothing easier. Let him know that the brilliant, the wealthy Mrs. Gordon is his wife; say that she has millions at her disposal; this poor girl has only one or two hundred thousand, the choice would be soon made."

"Do you believe it? can you think it was belief in my poverty, and not—not a deeper feeling that made him so cruel that night; would he have accepted me for this wealth?"

A painful red hovered in Adeline's cheek as she asked this question—it was shaping a humiliating doubt into words. It was exposing the scorpion that stung most keenly at her heart.

Jacob drew closer to his mistress; he clasped her two hands between his, and his heavy frame bent over her, not awkwardly, for deep feeling is never awkward.

"Oh, my mistress, say to me that you will give up this man—utterly give him up—even now you cannot guess how wicked he is; do not, by your wealth, help him to make new victims—do not see him and thus give him a right over yourself and your property, a right he will not fail to use—give up this ball—leave the city—this is no way to find that poor old man, that child—"

"Jacob! Jacob!" almost shrieked the unhappy woman, "do you see how such words wound and

rankle. I may be wild—the wish may be madness—but once more let me meet him face to face—”

Jacob dropped her hands, two great tears left his eyes and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

“How she loves that man,” he said, in a tone of despondency.

“Remember, Jacob, it is to serve another. What if thinking himself safe he marries that poor girl?” said Adeline, in a humble, deprecating tone.

“Madam!” answered Jacob, “do you know that the law gives this man power over you, a husband’s power, if he chooses to claim it?” Jacob broke off and clenched his huge hand in an agony of impatience, for his words had only brought the bright blood into that eloquent face: through those drooping lashes he saw the downcast eyes kindle.

“She hopes it! she hopes it!” he said, in the bitterness of his thought, “but I will save her—with God’s help I will save them both!”

When Adeline Leicester looked up to address her servant, he had left the room.

Among other things Jacob had been commissioned to procure a quantity of hot-house flowers, for the conservatories at Mrs. Gordon’s villa were to be kept in the full wealth of these blossoms, and Adeline was prodigal of flowers in every room of her dwelling, even when no company was expected. In order to procure enough for this grand gala evening, Jacob had resource to Mrs. Gray who trafficked at times in everything that has birth in the soil. Mrs. Gray was delighted with this commission, for it promised a rich windfall to her pretty favorite, Julia Warren. So after the market closed that day she went up to Dunlop’s and bargained for all the exotics his superb greenhouse could produce. She informed Julia of her good luck, and returned home with a warmth about the heart worth half-a-dozen Thanksgiving suppers, bountiful as hers always were.

The next day Julia was going up town, bearing a basket loaded with exotics on her arm. It was late in the afternoon, for the blossoms had been left on the stalk to the latest hour, that no sweet breath of their perfume should be wasted before they reached the boudoir they were intended to embellish.

It was a sweet task that Julia had undertaken. Loving flowers as she did, it was a delicious luxury to gaze down upon her dewy burden as she walked along, surrounded by a cloud of fragrance invisible as it was intoxicating. A life of privation had rendered her delicate organization keenly susceptible of this delicate enjoyment. It gratified the hunger of sensations almost ethereal. She loitered on her way, she touched the flowers with her hands, and every blossom was bathed in odor. Rich mosses of heliotrope, the snowy cape jessamine, clusters of starry daphna, crimson and white roses—with many other blossoms strange as they were sweet, made every breath she drew a delight. A glow of exquisite satisfaction spread over her face, her dreamy eyes were never lifted from the blossoms except when a corner was to be turned or an obstacle avoided.

“My girl, where are you going? Are those flowers for sale?”

Julia started, and looked up. She was just then

before a cottage house, laced with iron balconies and clouded with creeping vines, red with the crimson and gold of a late Indian summer. The garden in front was gorgeous with chain dahlias and other autumn flowers that had not yet felt the frost, and on the basin of a small marble fountain in the centre stood several large aquatic lilies, from which the falling water-drops rained with a constant and sleepy sound.

Julia did not see all this at once, for the glance that she cast around was too wild and startled. She clasped the basket of flowers closer to her side, and stood motionless. Some potent spell seemed upon her.

“Can’t you speak, child? are those flowers for sale?”

Julia remained gazing in the man’s face; her eyes, once fixed on those features, seemed immovable. He stood directly before her, holding the iron gate which led to the cottage open with his hand.

“No—no—if you please sir, they are ordered. A lady wants them.”

“Then they are not paid for—only ordered—come in here. There is a lady close by who may fancy some of those orange blossoms.”

“No, no, sir; the lady might be angry!”

“Nonsense! I want the flowers—not enough to be missed though—just a handful of the white ones. Here is a piece of gold worth half your load. Let me have what I ask, and I dare say your customer will give just as much for the rest.”

“I can’t, sir, indeed I can’t,” said Julia, drawing a corner of her little plaid shawl over the basket, “but if you are not in a hurry—if the lady can wait an hour—I will leave these and get some more from the greenhouse.”

The man did not answer, but, placing his hand on her shoulder, pushed the frightened child through the open gate.

“Let your customer wait—during the next hour you must stay here. It is not so much the flowers that I want as yourself!”

“Myself!” repeated the poor Julia, with white and quivering lips.

“Go in—go in—I want nothing that should frighten you. Stay—just now I remember that face. Remember, I am an old customer!”

“I remember,” answered Julia, and tears of affright rushed into her eyes.

“Then you know me again?—it was but a moment—how can you remember so long and so well?”

“By my feelings, sir—I wanted to cry then—I can’t help crying now?”

“This is strange! Young ladies are not apt to be so much shocked when I speak to them? No matter, I won’t loathe your flowers and your services just now: oblige me, and I will pay you well for the kindness.”

Julia had no choice, for as he spoke the gentleman closed the gate, and completely obstructed her way out.

“Pass on—pass on!” he said, with an imperative wave of the hand.

Julia obeyed, walking with nervous quickness as he drew close to her. The gentleman rang—a faint

noise came from within, and the door was opened by a quiet old lady in mourning.

"Then you have come—you persist!" she said, addressing the gentleman!

"Step this way a moment," he answered, in a subdued voice, opening the parlor door; "but first send this little girl up to Florence, if you still refuse, she must answer for a witness. Besides she has flowers in her basket, and my sweet bride would think a wedding ominous without them!"

"Ominous indeed!" said the lady, pointing with her finger that Julia should ascend the stairs. "Edward, I will not allow this to go on; to witness the sin would be to partake of it."

"Mother," answered Leicester, gently taking the lady's hand, while he led her to the parlor, "tell me your objections, and I will answer them with all respect. Why is my marriage with Florence Nelson opposed?"

"You have no right to marry—you are not free—cannot be so while Adeline lives."

"But Adeline is dead! Mother, say now if I am not free to choose a wife?"

"Dead! Adeline Wilcox dead! Oh, Edward, if this be true."

"If! It is true. See, here are letters bearing proof that even you must acknowledge."

He held out some letters bearing a European postmark. The old lady took them, put on her glasses, and suspiciously scrutinized every line.

"Are you convinced, mother, or must I go over sea, and tear the dead from her grave before your scruples yield?"

The old lady lifted her face: a tear stole from beneath her glasses.

"Go on," she said, in a deep, solemn voice—"go on, add victim to victim, legally or illegally, it scarce matters, that which you touch dies. But remember—remember, Edward, every new sin presses its iron mark hard on your mother's heart, the weight will crush her at length."

"Why is maternal love so strong in your bosom that Scripture is revised in my behalf? Must my iniquities roll back on past generations?" said the son, with a faint sneer.

"No, it is because in my own sin originates yours. Your father was a bad man, Edward Leicester, profligate, treacherous, fascinating as you are. I married him—woe, woe upon the arrogant pride—I married him and said, in wicked, self-confidence—'my love shall be his redemption.' My son—my son, you cannot understand me—you cannot think how terrible iniquity is when it folds you in its bosom. There is no poison like the love of a profligate—the fang of an adder is not more potent. It spreads through the whole being, it lives in the moral life of our children, I said—'my love is all powerful, it shall reform this man whom I love so madly.' I made the effort—I planted my soul beneath the Upas tree, and expected not only to escape but conquer the poison. Look at me, Edward, can you ever remember me other than I am—still, cold, hopeless! Yet I only lived with your father three years, before that I was bright and joyous beyond your belief. He died as he had lived.

Did the curse of my arrogance end there? No, it found new life in his son, his son and mine, I had blended my being with the poison of his. In you, Edward—in you my punishment embodied itself. Still I hoped, and strove against the evil entailed upon you, Heaven will bear me witness I struggled unceasingly, but as you approached maturity with all the beauty and talent of your father, the moral poison revealed itself also. Then the love that I felt for you changed to fear, and as one who has turned a serpent loose among the beautiful things of earth, I said, 'let my life be given to protect society from the evil spirit which my presumption has forced upon it.' It was an atonement acceptable of God. How many deserted victims my roof has sheltered you know—how many I have saved from the poison of your influence it is needless to say. This one, so gentle, so rich in affection, I hoped to win from her enthrallment, or, failing that, she might be resigned to the arms of death, more merciful, more gentle than yours. I have pleaded with her, warned her, but she answers as I answered when those who loved me said of your father, 'it is a sin to marry him!' Must she suffer as I have suffered? Oh! Edward, my son, turn aside this once from your prey, she is innocent—she is helpless—save her young heart from the stain that has fallen upon mine?"

"Nay, gentle mother, this is scarcely a compliment—you forget that I wish to marry the young lady."

How cold, how insulting were the tones of his voice—how relentless was the spirit that gleamed in his eyes. The unhappy mother stood before him, her pale hands clasped and uplifted, tears streaming down her face, and words of thrilling eloquence hushed upon her lips, that no syllable of his answer might be lost. It came, that dry, insolent rejoinder; her hands fell slowly down; her figure shrunk downward.

"I have done!" broke from her lips, and she walked slowly from the room.

"Madam, shall we expect you at the ceremony?" said Leicester, following her to the door.

She turned upon the stairs, and gave him a look so sad, so earnest, that even his cold heart beat slower.

"It is not important!" he muttered, turning back, "we can do without her; this little girl and the servant must answer, though I did hope to trust no one!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JULIA WARREN mounted the flight of steps in wild haste, as the caged bird springs from perch to perch when terrified by strange faces; then she paused in her fright, doubtful where to turn or what room to enter. As she stood thus irresolute, a door opposite was softly pushed open, and a fair, young face looked out. The eyes were bent downward; the cheek and temples, shaded with masses of loose ringlets, that admitting snowy glimpses of a graceful neck, and shoulders undressed save by these bright tresses, and a muslin dressing-gown half falling off and huddled to the bosom with a fair, little hand.

Imperceptibly the door swung more and more open,

till Julia caught the outline of a figure slender, flexible, and so fragile in its beauty, that to her excited imagination it seemed almost ethereal. Like a spirit that listens for some kindred sympathy, the young creature bent in the half open door. The faint murmur of voices from below rose and fell upon her ear. No words could be distinguished, nothing but the low, deep tones of a voice, familiar and dear as the pulsations of her own heart, blended with the strangely passionate accents of another. The gentle listener could hardly convince herself that some strange woman had not entered the house, so thrilling and so full of pathos was that voice, usually so calm and so cold.

Julia stood motionless, and holding her breath, she saw nothing but the outline of a slender person, the shadowy gleam of features through masses of wavy hair, but it seemed as if she had met that graceful vision before, it might be in a dream—it might be—stay, the young girl lifted her head, and swept back the ringlets with her hand. A pair of dark, liquid eyes fell upon the flower girl, and she knew the glance. The eyes were larger, brighter, more densely circled with shadows than they had been at the time that come back upon the child's memory, but the tender expression, the soft loveliness, nothing could change that.

The hand dropped from among the ringlets it held, away from that pale cheek, and a glow, as of freshly gathered roses, broke through them as Florence drew her form gently up, and stood with her eyes fixed upon the trembling intruder.

Julia came forward, changing color with every step.

"A gentleman, the lady I mean—I—I was sent up here. If they wan't the flowers for you I would not mind, though the other lady has spoken for them!"

Florence cast her eyes on the basket of flowers, a bright smile kindled over her face, and drawing the child into the chamber, she took the heavy basket in her arms, and, overpowered by its weight, sunk softly down to the carpet, still holding it in her lap. Thus with the treasure half buried in the white waves of her dressing-gown, she literally buried her face in the blossoms, while her very heart seemed to drink in the perfume that exhaled again in broken and exquisite sighs.

"And he sent them? how good, how thoughtful—oh! I am too, too happy!"

She gathered up a double handful of the blossoms, and rained them back into the basket. Their perfume floated around her, some of the buds fell in the folds of her snowy muslin, that drooped like waves of foam over her limbs. She was happy and beautiful as an angel gathering blossoms in some chosen nook of Paradise.

There was something contagious in all this, something that sent the dew to Julia's eyes, and a glow of love to her heart.

"I am glad—I am almost glad that he made me come in," she said, dropping on her knees that she might gather up some buds that had fallen over the basket—"how I wish you could have them all! He offered a large gold piece, but you know I could not take it. If we—that is if grandpa and grandma—were rich, I never would take a cent for flowers, it

seems as if God made them on purpose to give away."

"So they are not mine, after all?" said Florence, with a look and tone of disappointment.

"Yes—oh, yes, a few. That glass thing on the toilet, I will crowd it quite full, the prettiest too—just take out those you like best."

"Still he ordered them—he tried to purchase the whole, in that lies happiness enough." The sweet, joyous look stole back to her face again, that thought was more precious than all the fragrance and bloom she had coveted.

The door-bell rang. Florence heard persons coming from the parlor, she started up leaving the basket at her feet.

"Oh, I shall delay him—I shall be too late; will no one come to help me?" she exclaimed. "I dare not ask her, but you, surely you could stay for half an hour?"

"I must stay if you wish it: he will not let me go; but indeed, indeed, I am in haste. It will be quite dark!"

"I do not wish to keep you by force," said Florence, gently, "but you seem kind and I have no one to help me dress. Besides, she, his mother, will not stay in the room, and to think of being quite alone, with no bridesmaid—no woman even for a witness—it frightens me!"

"What—what is it that you wish of me?" questioned Julia, while a sudden and strange thrill ran through her frame.

"I wish you to stay a little while to help put on my dress, and then go down with me. You look very young, but no one else will come near me, and it seems unnatural to be married without a single female standing by."

Florence grew pale as she spoke; there was indeed something lonely and desolate in her position, which all at once come over her with overwhelming force. Julia, too, from surprise or some deeper feeling, seemed struck with a sudden chill; her lips were slightly parted, the color fled from her cheek.

"Married! married!" she repeated, in a voice that fell upon the heart of Florence like an omen.

"To-night—in an hour—I shall be his wife!" How pale was the poor bride as these words fell from her lips! How coldly lay the heart in her bosom! She bent her head as if waiting for the guardian angel who should have kept better watch over a being so full of trust and gentleness.

"His wife! *his*!" said Julia, recoiling a step, "oh! how can you—how can you?"

A crimson flush shot over that pale forehead, and Florence drew her form to its full height.

"Will you help me—will you stay?"

"I dare not say no!" answered the child. "I would not if I dare!"

Again the door-bell rang: "hush!" said Florence, breathlessly, "it is the clergyman, that is a strange voice, and he—Leicester—admits him. How happy I thought to be at this hour! but I am chilly, chilly as death; oh, help me child!"

She had been making an effort to arrange her hair, but her hands trembled, and at length fell helplessly down. She really seemed shivering with cold.

"Sit down, sit down in this easy-chair, and let me try," said Julia, shaking off the chill that had settled upon her spirits, and wheeling a large chair draped with white dimity, toward the toilet. Lights were burning in tall candlesticks on each side of a swing mirror, whose frame of filigree'd and frosted silver gleamed ghastly and cold on the pale face of the bride.

"How white I am; will nothing give me a color?" cried the young creature, starting up from the chair. "Warmth, that is what I want! My dress—let us put that on first—then I can muffle myself in something when you curl my hair."

She took up a robe of costly lace, rich with the art of Brussels. "Isn't it beautiful!" she said, with a smile, shaking out the soft folds. "He sent it." She then threw off her dressing gown and arrayed herself in the bridal robe; the exertion seemed to animate her; a bright bloom rose to her cheek, and her motions became nervous with excitement.

"Some arrange blossoms to loop up the tunic in front," she said, after Julia had fastened the dress; "here, just here!" and she gathered up a few folds of the soft lace in her hand, watching the child as she fell upon one knee to perform the task, for Florence was trembling from head to foot with the wild, eager excitement that had succeeded the chill of which she had complained, and could do nothing for herself. When the buds were all in place, Florence sunk into the easy-chair, huddling her snowy arms and bosom in a rose-colored opera cloak, for, though her cheeks were burning, cold shivers now and then seemed to ripple through her veins. The soft lining of swan's-down, which she pressed to her bosom with both hands, seemed devoid of all warmth one moment, and the next she flung it aside glowing with overheating. There was something more than agitation in all this, but it gave unearthly splendor to her beauty.

"Now—now," said Julia, laying the last ringlet softly down upon the bosom of the bride, "look at yourself, sweet lady, see how beautiful you are."

Florence stood up and smiled as she saw herself in the mirror, an angel from Heaven could not have looked more delicately radiant. Masses of raven curls fell upon the snow of her neck and her bridal dress. Circling her head, and bending with a soft curve to the forehead, was a light wreath of starry jessamine flowers woven with the deep, feathery green of some delicate spray that Julia had selected from her basket, because it was so tremulous and fairy-like. All at once the smile fled from the lips of Florence Nelson, a look of mournful affright came to her eyes, and she raised both her hands to tear away the wreath.

"Did you know it? Was this done on purpose?" she said, turning upon the child.

"What—what have I done?"

"This wreath, these jessamines, you have woven them with cypress leaves." Florence sunk into the chair shuddering, she had no strength to unweave the ominous wreath from her head.

"I—I did not know it," said the child, greatly distressed, "they were beautiful, I only thought of that. Shall I take them off, and put roses in the place?"

"Yes, yes—roses, roses, these make me feel like death!"

That instant there was a gentle knock at the chamber-door, Julia opened it, and there stood Mr. Leicester. The child drew back; he saw Florence standing before the toilet.

"Florence, love, we are waiting!"

He advanced into the chamber, and drew her arm through his. She looked back into the mirror, and shuddered till the cypress leaves trembled visibly in her curls.

"My beautiful—my wife!" whispered Leicester, pressing her hand to his lips.

What woman could withstand that voice, those words? The color came rushing to her cheek again, the light to her eyes: she trembled, but not with ominous fear. Those words, sweeter than hope, shed warmth, and light, and joy where terror had been.

"Follow us!" said Leicester, addressing the child.

Julia moved forward: a thought seemed to strike the bridegroom, he paused—

"You can write, at least well enough to sign your name?" he said.

"Yes, I can write!" she answered, timidly.

"Very well—come!"

The parlor was brilliantly lighted, every shutter was closed, and over the long window, hitherto shaded only with lace, fell curtains of azure damask, making the seclusion more perfect.

A clergyman was in the room: and Leicester had brought his servant as a witness. This man stood near the window, leaning heavily against the wall, his features immovable, his eyes bent upon the door. Julia started as she saw him, for she remembered the time they had met before upon the wharf, that most eventful day of her life. His glance fell on her as she came timidly in behind the bridegroom and the bride, there was a slight change in his countenance, then a gleam of recognition, which made the child feel less completely among strangers.

It was a brief ceremony; the clergyman's voice was monotonous; the silence chilling. Julia wept in silence, to her it seemed like a funeral.

The certificate was made out. Jacob signed his name, but so bunglingly that no one could have told what it was—Mr. Leicester did not make the effort. Julia took the pen, her little hand trembled violently, but the name was written quite well enough for a girl of her years.

"Now, sir—now please, may I go?" she said, addressing Leicester.

"Yes—yes, here is the piece of gold, I trust your employer will find no fault—but first tell me where you live?"

Julia told him where to find her humble abode, and hurried from the room. Her basket of flowers had been left in the chamber above; she ran up to get it, eager to be gone. In her haste she opened the nearest door; it was a bed-room, dimly lighted, and by a low couch knelt the old lady she had seen in the hall. Her hands were clasped, her white face uplifted, there was anguish in her look: but that tearless anguish that can only be felt after the passions are quenched. Julia drew softly back. She found her basket in

the next room, and come forth again, bearing it on her arm. She heard Leicester's voice while passing through the hall, and hurried out dreading that he might attempt to detain her.

Scarcely had the child passed out when Leicester came forth, leading Florence by the hand. He spoke a few words to her in a low voice: "try and reconcile her, Florence. She never loved me, I know that, but who could resist you? To-morrow, if she proves stubborn, I will take you hence, or, at the worst, in a few days we will be ready for our voyage to Europe."

Florence listened with downcast eyes. "My father, my kind old father! he will not be angry; he must have known how it would end when he gave me to your charge. Still it may offend him to hear that I am married, when he thinks me at school."

"He will not be angry, love!" said Leicester, and he thought of the letter announcing old Mr. Nelson's death. "But the good lady up stairs; you must win her into a better mood before we meet again; till then, sweet wife, adieu!"

He kissed her hand two or three times—cast a hurried glance up stairs, as if afraid of being seen, and then pressed her, for one instant, to his bosom.

"Sweet wife!" the name rang through and through her young heart like a chime of music. She held her breath and listened to his footsteps as he left the house, then stole softly up the stairs.

The clergyman went out while Julia was up stairs in search of her flowers. Jacob Strong left the parlor at the same time, but instead of returning, he let the clergyman out and, moving back into the darkened extremity of the hall, stood there, concealed and motionless. He witnessed the interview between Leicester and Florence, and, so still was everything around, heard a little of the conversation.

Before Florence was half way up the stairs he came out of the darkness and spoke to her.

"Only a little while, dear lady, pray come back; I will not keep you long."

Florence, thinking that Leicester had left some message with his servant, descended the stairs and entered the parlor. Jacob followed her and closed the door; a few minutes elapsed, possibly ten, and there came from the closed room a low cry, followed by a voice wild with passionate anguish. The door was flung open—the bride staggered forth and supported herself against the frame-work.

"Mother! mother! oh, madam!" Her voice broke and ended in gasping sobs.

A door overhead opened, and the old lady whom Julia had seen upon her knees came gliding like a black shadow down the stairs.

"I thought that he had gone," she said, and her usually calm accent a little hurried. "Would he kill you under my roof? Edward Leicester!"

"He is not here—he is gone," sobbed Florence, "but that man——" she pointed with her finger toward Jacob Strong, who stood a little within the door. He came forward, revealing a face from which all the stolid indifference was swept away. It was not only troubled but wet with tears.

"It is cruel—I have been awfully cruel," he said,

addressing the old lady—"but she must be told. I could not put it off. She thought herself his wife!"

"I am his wife!—I am his wife!—*his wife*, do you hear?" almost shrieked the wretched girl. "He called me so himself! You saw us married, and yet dare to slander him!"

"Lady, she is not his wife!" said Jacob, sinking his voice, but speaking earnestly, as if the task he had undertaken was very painful. "He is married already!"

"He told me—and gave me letters from abroad to prove it—that Adeline was dead!" The old lady spoke in her usual calm way, but her face was paler than it had been, and her eyes were full of mournful commiseration as she bent them upon the wretched bride.

"Then he *was* married—he has been married before!" murmured Florence, and her poor, pale hands fell helplessly down. The old lady drew close to her, as if to offer some comfort, but she had so long held all affectionate impulses in abeyance that even this action was constrained and chilling, though her heart yearned toward the poor girl.

"Madam, did you believe him when he said his wife was no more?" questioned Jacob Strong.

The old lady shook her head, and a mournful smile stole across her thin lips; pain is fearfully impressive when wrung from the heart in a smile like that. Florence shuddered.

"And you—you also, his mother!" burst from her quivering lips.

"God forgive me! I am," answered the old lady.

"Then," said Jacob Strong, turning his face resolutely from the poor, young creature, whose heart his words were crushing: "Then, madam, you have seen his wife?—you would know her again?"

"Yes, I should know her."

"This night, this very night, you shall see her then. Come with me; this poor young lady will not believe what I have said, come and be a witness that Mrs. Adeline Leicester is alive—alive with his knowledge. Two hours from this you shall see them together—Edward Leicester and his wife—the mother of his child—will you come? There seems no other way by which this poor child can be saved."

"I—I will go! let me witness this meeting," cried Florence, suddenly arousing herself, and standing upright. "I will not take his word nor yours. You slander him!—you slander him! If he has a wife let me look upon her with my own eyes."

The old lady and Jacob looked at each other. Florence stood before them, her soft eyes flashing, her cheeks fired with the blood, grief had driven from her heart.

"You dare not—I know it, you dare not!"

Still her auditors looked at each other in painful doubt.

"I knew that it was false!" cried Florence, with a smile of wild exultation. "You hesitate—this proves it. To-morrow, madam, I will leave this roof—I will go to my husband. The very presence of those who slander him is hateful to me. To-night! yes, this instant, I will go!"

"Let her be convinced," said the old lady.

The strong nerves of Jacob gave way. He looked at that young face, so beautiful in its wild anguish, and shrunk from the consequences of the conviction that awaited her.

"It would be her death!" he said, "I cannot do it!"

"Better death than that which might follow this unbelief."

The old lady placed her hand upon Jacob's arm, and drew him aside. They conversed together in low voices, and Florence regarded them with her large, wild eyes, earnestly, as a wounded gazelle might gaze upon its pursuers.

"Come!" said Leicester's mother, attempting to lay her hand upon the shrinking arm of the bride, "it needs some preparation, but you shall go. God help us both, for this is a fearful task!"

Florence was strong with excitement. She turned, and almost ran up the stairs. Jacob went out, and during the next two hours, save a slight sound in the upper rooms from time to time, the cottage seemed abandoned.

At length a carriage stopped at the gate. Jacob entered, and seating himself in the parlor, waited. They came down at last, but so changed, that no human penetration could have detected their identity. The old lady was still in black, but so completely enveloped in a veil of glossy silk, that nothing but her eyes could be seen. A diamond crescent upon the forehead, a few silver stars scattered among the sombre folds that flowed over her person, gave sufficient character to a dress that was only chosen as a disguise.

Florence was in a similar dress, save that every thing about her was snowy white. A veil of flowing silk had been cast over her bridal array, glossy and wave-like, but thick enough to conceal her features. Like the other costume, her dress was sprinkled with stars. That which represents the morning—of a larger size and sparkling with diamonds—gathered up the veil on her left temple, leaving it to flow, like the billows of a cloud, over her form, and downward till it swept her feet. Without a word the three went forth and entered the carriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE take the reader once more to the residence of Adeline Leicester; not as formerly, when the tempest raged around its walls and darkness slept in its sumptuous apartments, when sobs and groans, and the wail of tortured persons alone broke the gloomy stillness. Not as then do we re-visit the stately mansion, with its tall old trees, its turrets and its stained sashes, from which clouds and clouds of gorgeous light come pouring upon the bland autumnal air. So broad was the illumination, so rich the tinted rays, you might have seen to gather autumn flowers from the ground, even to the most shaded extremity. But the white dahlias were tinged of an amber hue in that rich glow; the wax-balls hung like drops of gold on the thickets, and the trees, to the depth of their ripe foliage, were luminous with rich light, blending with the still more gorgeous leaves.

Julia Warren approached this mansion with admiring wonder. It seemed like something she had read of in a fairy tale—the lamps gleaming like stars among the trees and in the thickets; the foliage so strangely luminous; the crisp glass tinged with a brownish and golden green. All these things were like enchantment to the child, she whose life had been in that dull, comfortless basement. She looked around in delighted bewilderment, the very basket upon her arm seemed filled with strange blossoms as she entered the lofty vestibule, and changed the richly hued atmosphere without for the flood of pure gas-light that filled the dwelling.

"Oh! here she is at last—why, child, what has kept you?" A pretty young woman, in a jaunty cap and pink ribbons, made this exclamation, while Julia stood looking about in her bewilderment. Her very dress, her quick, but graceful movements, had an imposing effect upon the child.

"Are you the lady?" she said.

"No—no!" answered the girl, with a pretty laugh, for the compliment pleased her. "Come up stairs, quick—quick, my lady has been so impatient."

They went up a flight of steps, the waiting-maid exchanging words with a footman who passed them, Julia treading lightly with her load of flowers. Her little feet sunk into the carpet at every step: once only in her life had she felt the same elastic swell follow her tread. Nothing could be more unlike than the dark mansion that rose upon her memory, and the vision-like beauty of everything upon which her eyes fell. The floors seemed literally trodden down with flowers. Rich draperies of silk met her eye wherever she turned. A door swung open to a touch of the waiting-maid. Julia remembered the room which they entered. The couch of carved ivory and azure damask—the lace curtains that hung against the windows like floating frost-work—the rich blue waves that fell over them, and, dearer than all, the marble Flora placed near the couch, bending from its pedestal with pure and classic grace, gazing so intently on the white lilies in its hand as if it doubted that the flowers were indeed but a beautiful mockery of nature.

Julia drew a quick breath as she recognized all these objects, but the waiting-maid gave her but little time even for surprise. She crossed the room and opened a door on the opposite side. They entered a dressing-room, leading evidently to a sumptuous bed-chamber, for through the open door Julia could see glimpses of rose-colored damask sweeping from the windows, and a snow white bed, over which masses of embroidered lace fell in transparent billows to the floor. The dressing-room corresponded with the chamber, but Julia saw nothing of its splendor. Her eyes were turned upon a toilet richly draped with lace, and littered with jewels; a standing-glass set in frosted silver, was lighted on each side by a small alabaster lamp, which hung against the exquisite chasing like two great pearls, each with perfumed flame breaking up from its heart.

It was not the sight of this superb toilet, though a fortune had been flung carelessly upon it, that made the child's heart beat so tumultuously, but the lady who stood before it. Her back was toward the door,

but Julia felt who she was, though the beautiful features were only reflected upon her from the mirror.

The lady turned. Her eyes were bent upon the diamond bracelet she was trying to clasp on her arm. Oh! how different was that face from the tear-stained features Julia had seen that dark night. How radiant, how more than beautiful she was now! Every motion replete with grace; every look brilliant with flashes of exulting loveliness!

How great was the contrast between that superb creature, in her robe of rich and glossy satin, heightened by the floating lustre of soft illusion lace, which seems, more than any fabric on earth, like a web of woven moonlight, and the humble child who stood there so motionless, with the flower basket at her feet, her hands folded in that little plaid shawl, her large eyes filled with wonder beneath the pink hood, now faded with much washing. Notwithstanding this contrast between the proud and mature beauty of the woman and the meek loveliness of the child, there was an air, a look, something indeed indescribable in one, which reminded you of the other. Adeline turned suddenly, and moved a step toward the child; a thousand diamond sparks flashed from the folds of her lace overdress as she moved; a wreath of trembling brilliants studded up the golden depths of her profuse tresses, but all the light of her diamonds was not more beautiful than the smile that broke over her features as she recognized the little girl.

"And so, you have found me again," she said, untying the pink hood, and smoothing the bright hair thus exposed with her two palms, much to the surprise of the waiting-maid. "Look, Rosanna, is she not lovely, with her meek eyes and that smile?"

The waiting-maid glanced her black eyes from the lady to the child: "beautiful! why, madam, the smile is your own!"

"Rosanna! cried the lady, "this is flattery; never again speak of my resemblance to any one, especially to a child of that age. It offends, it pains me!"

"I did not think to offend, madam; the little girl is so pretty—how could I?"

Adeline did not heed her; she was gazing earnestly on the little girl. The smile had left her face, and this made a corresponding change in the sensitive child. She felt as if some offence had been given, else why should the lady look into her eyes with such earnest sadness?

"What is your name?"

The question was given in a low and hesitating voice.

"Julia, Julia Warren."

"Yes, that is enough. Rosanna, never speak in this way again!"

"Never, if madam desires it? But the flowers: see what quantities the little thing has brought. No wonder she was late—such a load."

"True, we were waiting for the flowers; here, fill my bouquet holder—the choicest, remember—and let every blossom be fragrant."

Rosanna took a bouquet holder, whose delicate net work of gold seemed too fragile for all the jewels with which it was enriched, and kneeling upon the floor began to arrange a cluster of flowers. Her

active fingers had just wound the last crimson and white roses together, when a footman knocked at the door. She started up, and went to see what was wanted.

"Madam, the company are arriving; two carriages have set down their loads already."

Adeline had been too long in society for this announcement to confuse or hurry her, had no unusual cause of excitement arisen, but as it was, the superb repose, usual to her manner, was disturbed: "who are they? have you seen them before?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, madam, often."

"No stranger—no gentleman who never came before—you are certain?"

"None, madam."

There was something more in this than the usual anxiety of a hostess to receive her guests. "I am insane to loiter here," she murmured, drawing on her gloves; "he might have come—for the universe I would not miss his first look—the bouquet, Rosanna, and handkerchief, where is my handkerchief?"

"Is this it, ma'am?" said Julia, raising a soft mass of gossamer cambric and costly lace from the carpet, where it had fallen.

This drew Adeline's notice once more to the child. "Oh, I had forgotten," she said, going back to the toilet and taking up a purse that lay among the jewels, "here; I have not time to count it, take the money, but some day you must bring back the purse, remember."

She took her bouquet hastily from the waiting-maid, and went out, leaving the purse in Julia's hand. She crossed the boudoir and then turned back; "remember, the flowers are for these rooms," she said, addressing the maid, and waving her hand with a motion that indicated the bed chamber and boudoir. "Let me find them everywhere."

With this command she disappeared, leaving the doors open behind her. Julia drew a deep breath, as the gleam of her garments was lost in descending the stairs; turning sorrowfully away, her eyes fell upon the purse; several gold pieces gleamed through the crimson network. "What shall I do—these cannot be all mine? the flowers did not cost half so much."

"No matter," was the cheerful reply, "she gave it to you. It is her way; keep it."

The child still hesitated.

"If you think it is not all right, say so when you bring back the purse," said the maid, good naturedly. "Who knows but it may prove a fairy gift? I'm sure her presents often do."

Julia was not quite convinced, even by this kind prophecy. Still, she had no choice but obedience, and so, bidding pretty Rosanna a gentle good night, she stole through the boudoir and away through the front entrance, for she knew of no other; and folding her shawl close as she encountered crowds of brilliantly dressed people passing through the vestibule.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEICESTER went to his hotel after his marriage, for though he had accepted an invitation to the fancy ball

which was turning the fashionable world half crazy, matters more important demanded his attention. Premeditating a crime which might bring its penalty directly upon his own person, he had made arrangements to evade all possible chances of this result, by embarking at once for Europe with his falsely married bride. In order to prepare funds for this purpose, the project for which Robert Otis had been so long in training had been that day put in action. The old copy-book with its mass of evidence was—as he supposed—safe in Robert's apartment. The check, forged with marvelous accuracy, which we have seen placed in his letter-case, had in the morning passed into the hands of his premeditated victim, and that night the youth was to meet him with the money. Thus everything seemed secure. True, his own hands had signed the check, but Robert had presented it at the bank, he would draw the money. When the fraud became known, his premises would be searched, and there was the old copy-book bearing proofs of such practice in penmanship as would condemn any one—over and over again might the very signature of that forged check be found in the pages of this book, on scraps of loose paper, and even on other checks bearing the same imprint and on the same paper. With proof so strong against the youth, how was suspicion to reach the rich Leicester? Would the simple word of an accused lad be taken? and what other evidence existed?—none—none! It was a fiendishly woven plot, and at every point seemed faultless. Still Leicester was ill at ease. The consciousness that the acts of this day had placed him within possible reach of the law, was unpleasant to a man, in whom prudence almost took the place of conscience. The hour had arrived, but Robert was not at Leicester's chamber when he returned. This made the evil-doer anxious and restless. He walked the room, he leaned from the window and looked out upon the crowd below. He drank off glass after glass of wine, and for once, suffered all the poor tortures of dread and suspense which he had so ruthlessly inflicted on others.

All this time Robert Otis was in the building, waiting for Jacob Strong. That strange personage came at last, but more agitated than Robert had ever seen him; and well he might be; for half an hour before he had left Leicester's wretched bride but half conscious of her misery and yet so heart-rending in her grief. In an hour more he was to conduct her where she would learn all the sorrow of her destiny. Jacob had a feeling heart, and these thoughts gave him more pain than any one would have deemed possible.

"Here is the money, go down at once and give it to him, I heard his step in the chamber," he said, addressing Robert. "The count is correct, I drew it myself from the bank this morning."

"Tell me, is this money yours?" questioned the youth, "I would do nothing in the dark."

"You are right, boy; no, the money is not mine, I am not worth half the sum. I have no time for a long story, but, there is one—a lady, rich beyond anything you ever dreamed of—who takes a deep interest in this bad man."

"What, Florence—Miss Nelson?" exclaimed Robert.

"No, an older and still more noble victim. I had but to tell her the money would be used for him, and, behold, ten thousand dollars—the sum, he thought enough to pay for your eternal ruin. My poor nephew!"

"Nephew, did you say, nephew, Jacob?"

"You call me Jacob—Jacob Strong—Uncle Jacob—call me everything on earth for I have loved you, I have tried you—kiss me! kiss me! I haven't had you in my arms since you were a baby—and I want something to warm my heart. I never thought it could ache as it has to-night."

"Uncle Jacob—my mother's brother—I do not understand it, but to know this is enough!"

The youth flung himself upon Jacob's bosom, and for a moment was almost crushed in those huge arms.

"Now, that has done me a world of good!" exclaimed the uncle, brushing a tear from his eyes with the cuff of his coat, a school-boy habit that came back with the first powerful home feeling. "Now go down and feed the serpent with this money. You won't be afraid to mind me now."

"No, if you were to order me to jump out of the window I would do it."

"You might, you might, for I would be at the bottom to catch you in my arms! Here is the money, I will be in the drawing-room as a witness: it won't be the first time I can tell you."

Leicester started and turned pale, even to his lips, as Robert entered his chamber; for a sort of nervous dread possessed him, and in order to escape from this, his anxiety to obtain means of leaving the country had become intense. He looked keenly at Robert, but waited for him to speak. The youth was also pale, but resolute and self-possessed. "The bank was closed before I got there", he said, in a quiet business tone, setting a small leather box on the table and unlocking it, "but I found a person who was willing to negotiate the check. He will not want the money at once and so it saves him the trouble of making a deposit."

Leicester could with difficulty suppress the exclamation of relief that sprang to his lips, as Robert opened the box, revealing it half full of gold; but remembering that any exhibition of pleasure would be out of place, he observed with apparent composure, "you have counted it, I suppose. Were you obliged to exchange bills with any of the brokers, as I directed, to get the gold?"

"No, it was paid as you see it," answered the youth, moving toward the door, for his heart so rose against the man that he could not force himself to endure the scene a moment longer than was necessary.

"Stay, take the box with you," said Leicester, pouring the gold into a drawer of his desk, "I will not rob you of that." Robert understood the whole, a faint smile curved his lip, and, taking the box, he went out.

"No evidence, nothing but pure gold," muttered Leicester, exultingly, as he closed the drawer. "It is well for you, my young friend, that the holder of that precious document does not wish to present his check at once. Liberty is sweet to the young, and this

secures a few more days of its enjoyment for you—and for me—ah, there everything happens most fortunately; why a good steamer will put us half over the Atlantic before this little mistake is suspected.”

Leicester was a changed man after this, his spirits rose with unnatural exhilaration. “Now for this grand ball,” he said, aloud, surveying his fine person in the glass. “Surely a man’s wedding garments ought to be fancy dress enough. Another pair of gloves though; this comes of temptation; I must finger the gold forsooth.”

The ruthless man smiled and muttered such broken fragments of thought as he took off the scarcely soiled gloves and replaced them with a pair of still more spotless white. He was long in fitting them on his hand, he fastidiously re-arranged other portions of his dress: all sense of the great fraud, that ought to have borne his soul to the earth, had left him when the gold appeared. You could see, by his broken words, how completely lighter fancies had replaced the black deed.

“This Mrs. Gordon, I wonder if she really is the creature they represent her to be. If it were not for this voyage to Europe, now, one might—no, no, there is no chance.” Thus muttering and smiling, Leicester left the hotel.

The evening was very beautiful, and Leicester always loved to enter a fashionable drawing-room after the guests had assembled. He reflected that a quiet walk would bring him to Mrs. Gordon’s mansion about the time he thought most desirable, and sauntered on, resolved at any rate not to reach his destination too early. But sometimes he fell into thought, and then his pace became unconsciously hurried. He reached the upper part of the city earlier than he had intended, and had taken out his watch before a lighted window to convince himself of the time, when a timid voice addressed him—

“Sir, will you please tell me the name of this street?”

He turned and saw the little girl whom he had forced to become a witness to his marriage. She shrunk back terrified, on recognizing him. “I did not know—I did not mean it,” she faltered out.

“What, have you lost the way?” said Leicester, in a voice that made her shiver, though it was low and sweet enough.

“Yes, sir, but I can find it!”

“Where do you live? oh, I remember. Well, as I have time enough, what if I walk a little out of my way and see that nothing harms you?”

“No, no, the trouble!”

“Never mind the trouble. You shall show me where you live, pretty one, then I shall be certain where to find you again.”

Still Julia hesitated. “Besides,” said Leicester, taking out his purse, “you forget, I have not paid for robbing your basket of all those pretty flowers.”

“No!” answered the child, now quite resolutely. “I am paid. The poor young lady is welcome to them.”

Leicester laughed. “The poor, young lady, my own pretty bride, well I like that.”

Julia walked on. She hoped that he would forge

his object, or only intended to frighten her. But he kept by her side, and was really amused by the terror inflicted on the child. He had half an hour’s time on his hand, how could he kill it more pleasantly? Besides, he really was anxious to know with certainty where the young creature lived. She was one of his witnesses. She had, in a degree, become connected with his fate. Above all, she was terrified to death, and like Nero, Leicester, would have amused himself with torturing flies if no larger or fiercer animal presented itself. His evil longing to give pain was insatiable as the Roman tyrant’s, and more cruel, for while Nero contented himself with physical agony, Leicester appeased his craving spirit with nothing but the keen feeling, the sensitive heart-string.

“I live here,” said Julia, stopping short, before a low old house, breathless with the effort she had made to escape her tormentor. “Do not go any further, Grandpa never likes to see strangers.”

“Go on—go on,” answered Leicester, in a tone that was jeeringly good-natured, “grandpa will be delighted.”

Julia ran desperately down the area steps. She longed to close the basement door after her and hold it against the intruder, but as this thought flashed across her mind, Leicester stood by her side in the dark hall. She ran forward and opened the door of that poor basement room which was her home. Still he kept by her side. The basement was full of that dusky gloom which a handful of embers had power to shed through the darkness, for the old people, whose outlines were faintly seen upon the hearth, were too poor for a prodigal waste of light when no work was to be done by it.

“Is it you, darling, and so out of breath?” said the voice of an old man, who rose and began to grope with his hand upon the mantle-piece. “What kept you so long, poor grandma has been in a terrible way about it.” While he spoke the grating of a match that would not readily ignite, was heard against the chimney-piece.

“The gentleman, grandpa, here is a gentleman, he would come,” cried the child, artlessly. This seemed to startle the old man. The match would not kindle; he stooped down and touched it to a live ember; as he rose again the pale blue flames fell upon the face of his wife, and rose to his own features. The illumination was but for a moment, then the sodden wick began to fuse slowly into flame, but it was nearly half a minute before the miserable candle gave out its full complement of light. The old man turned toward the open door shading the candle with his hand.

“Where, child, I see no gentleman.”

Julia looked around. A moment before Leicester had stood at her side. “He is gone, he is gone,” she exclaimed, springing forward. “Oh, grandma, oh, grandpa, how he did frighten me; it was the man I saw on the wharf that day!”

CHAPTER XIX.

SPLENDID beyond anything hitherto known in American life was the ball, of which the reader has had

partial glimpses. But I have no room for description nor is it needful to the completeness of my story, that those lofty drawing-rooms, those open boudoirs, that matchless conservatory, approached through a noble picture gallery should be presented save in gorgeous masses as one sees a rich cloud in the twilight. In all that brilliant crowd our story deals with four persons only. The hostess, in all the lustre of her superb beauty; a singularly elegant man, out of costume, who was seen to address her two or three times in the crowd; and two characters, "Night and Morning," so completely veiled that no penetration could guess of their features. These characters hovered around one of these two persons all the time, not with any appearance of gay frolic, but with a sort of timid pertinacity—which, but for their singular costume, would have escaped observation. Many in the crowd remarked that the beauty of their hostess grew more dazzling, her speech and manner more wildly brilliant. Often this man, so striking in his appearance, so calm in his demeanor, joined the gay throng that surrounded her, but when he stole softly to her side and bent his head in addressing her, two only caught the import of his words. At this moment "Night and Morning" hovered close to them, though with their faces the other way. No one heard the faint groan smothered within the folds of that white veil—no one saw the steady arm of Night, as it was folded around and supported the frail Morning.

It was over at last. The saloon, the banquet hall, the conservatory, sleeping in the moonlight shed from many a sculptured vase—all were deserted; wax candles flared and went out in their silver sockets, garlands grew dim and shadowy in the diminished light, half a dozen yawning footmen glided about extinguishing wax lights, and turning off gas, but they seemed ghost-like and dreary, wandering through the vast mansion.

But Adeline Leicester felt no fatigue; she saw nothing of the gloom that was so rapidly spreading over the splendor of her mansion. Her boudoir was still lighted by those two pearl-like lamps. It was a dim, luxurious twilight, that seemed hazy with the perfume stealing up from a dozen snowy vases scattered through the drawing-room, the bed-chamber, and the boudoir. The doors connecting these apartments were ajar, but closed enough to conceal one room from the other.

Adeline entered the boudoir. Her steps were imperious; her cheek burning. Pride, anger, and haughty scorn swelled in her bosom, as she seated herself to wait. One of those mysterious revulsions of feeling that are so frequent to a passionate and ill-disciplined nature, had swept over her heart. For the first time in her life she felt disposed to sting the foot that had trampled so ruthlessly upon her. In that moment, all the strong love of a life time seemed kindling into fiery hate.

It was one of those hours when we defy destiny—defy our own souls. A few hours earlier and she could not have met him thus with scorn on her brow, rebellion in her heart. A few hours after she might repent in tears, but now she waited his approach without a thrill of pleasure or of fear. The very

memory of former tenderness filled her with self-contempt. The marble Flora stood over her—crimson roses and heliotrope had been mingled with the sculptured lilies in its hand. A few hours before she had stolen away from her guests, to place these blossoms among the marble counterfeits, for they breathed his favorite perfume; now, she sickened as the fragrance floated over her, and tearing them from the statue, tossed them amid a bed of coals still burning in the silver grate. She did not go back to the couch, but remained upon the ermine rug, with one arm resting upon the jetty marble of the mantelpiece. No footstep could be heard in that sumptuously carpeted house, but the proud spirit within her seemed to know when he stole softly forth from the conservatory, and approached the room where she was waiting.

Leicester was self-possessed; he had a game to play, more intricate, more difficult than his experience had yet coped with, but this only excited his intellect. With a heart of stone the nerves hold no sympathy, and are obedient to the will alone: and what had ever resisted Leicester's will?

But she also was self-possessed, and this took him by surprise. He moved toward the grate and leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, directly opposite her. She held a superb fan, half open, against her bosom: it was fringed deep with the gorgeous plumage of some tropical bird, but no tumult of the heart stirred a feather. She held it there, as she had often done that evening, when homage floated around her, gracefully and quietly waiting to be addressed. This mood was one he had not expected; it deranged all his premeditated plan of attack. Instead of reproaching him, with that passionate anger that pants for reconciliation, she was silent.

"Adeline!" The name was uttered in a voice that no heart that had loved the speaker could entirely resist. A faint shiver was perceptibly ruffling, as it were, the plumage of her form, but the proud woman only bent her head.

"Was it delicate—was it honorable to deceive your husband thus?" he said, "to grant him one interview after so many years, and then conceal yourself from his search under this disguise? I have sought for you, Adeline, Heaven only knows how anxiously."

She smiled a cold, incredulous smile, for well she knew how he had searched for her.

"You do not believe me," said Leicester, attempting to take her hand, but she drew back, pressing the fan harder to her bosom, till the delicately wrought ivory broke. The demon of pride grew strong within her. For the first time in her life she felt a knowledge of power over the man who had been her fate.

"Was I to seek you that your foot might be planted on my heart once more? Was I to offer my bosom to the serpent fang again and again? Have you forgotten our interview in the chamber overhead?—that chamber where I had hoarded every thing connected with the only happy months you ever permitted me to know—so full of precious memories I thought they would touch even your heart."

He attempted to speak, but she would not permit him. "I did not know you, notwithstanding past

experience. Your heart has blacker shades than I imagined! Not up there—not among objects holy from association with my child, should I have taken you, but here! here! do not these things betoken great wealth!" A scornful smile curved her lips, and she glanced around the boudoir.

There was one word in this speech that Leicester seized upon. "Your child, Adeline? Great Heaven! would you exlude me from all share even in the love of our child!"

Even this did not soften her, though she was fearfully moved at the mention of her lost infant. He saw this, and instantly his manner changed. "Why should I plead with you—why waste words thus?" he said, casting aside all affectation of tenderness:—"you are my wife—lawfully married—the mother of my child. If you have property, by the laws of this land that property is mine! I plead no longer, madam! Being the master of this house, if it is yours, my province is to command. Tell me, then? this wealth—for which people give their idol, Mrs. Gordon, so much credit—this mansion; are they real?—are they yours?—mine?"

The scorn that broke over Adeline's face was absolutely sublime.

"Yes," she said, "this wealth is mine, yours, if the law makes it so; but listen—then say if you will use it?"

She bent forward; her lips and cheek were pale as death, but across the snow of her forehead a crimson flush came and went, like an arrow shooting back and again.

"You asked me that night, in the room above, if I had lived in Europe as the governess of that man's daughter—the governess only—I answered, yes; a governess only. It was false! Every dollar of the millions I possess comes from this man; he bequeathed it on his death-bed, that I might not again become your slave!" The haughty air gave way as she uttered this confession; her limbs trembled so violently that she was obliged to lean heavily on the mantel-piece to keep from sinking to the floor. Pride, that treacherous demon, left her then, helpless as a child.

"This," said Leicester, with a stern, clear enunciation, "this in no way interferes with my claim on the property. Were it double, that would be poor atonement for the outrage to my affections—the disgrace brought upon my name."

She did not speak, but listened in breathless silence, trying to comprehend the moral enormity before her, with a confused sense that even yet she had not fathomed the black depths of his heart.

Leicester had paused, thinking that she would answer, but as she remained silent he spoke again, still calmly, and with measured intonation. "But that which you have confessed becomes important in another sense. If the law gives me your property, it also enables me to divest it of the only incumbrance that would be unpleasant. Your confession, madam, entitles me to a divorce."

"You would not—oh, Heavens, no!" gasped the wretched woman.

"Now you seem natural—now you are meek

again," he said, with a laugh that cut to the heart. "So, you thought to dazzle me with your wealth—wither me with haughty pride—fool! miserable fool!"

"Mercy, mercy! Will no one save me from this man!" shrieked the wretched woman, flinging her clasped hands wildly upward.

Leicester was about to speak again, something fearfully bitter—you could see it in the curve of his lip—but his cry had reached other ears, and while the taunt was yet unspoken, Jacob Strong entered the boudoir. Leicester gazed upon him in utter amazement, for he advanced directly toward Adeline, and taking the clasped hands she held out in both his, led her to the couch, trembling, and so faint that she was incapable of uttering a word.

"What is this! how came you here, fellow?" said Leicester, the moment he could break from the astonishment occasioned by Jacob's presence.

"My mistress called for help, and I came," was the steady answer.

"Your mistress—where, who?"

"This lady—your first wife! the other——"

"Villain! who are you?"

Jacob looked into his master's eyes with a steady and calm stare—"look at me, Mr. Leicester! I have grown since you saw me at old Mr. Wilcox's! No doubt you have forgotten the awkward boy who tended your horse, and pointed out the best trout streams for you? But I, I shall never forget! No angry looks, no frowns, sir! The rocks we climbed together would feel them more than I do."

"Go on—go on—I would learn more!" said Leicester, paling fearfully about the mouth. "You have been a spy in my service?"

"Yes—a spy! a witness—a keeper of your most dangerous secrets! I read the letter from Georgia—I have that old copy-book which was to have sent Robert Otis, my own nephew, to state prison. There is a check of ten thousand which I can lay my hand on at any moment—you comprehend! I saw it written—I saw it pass from your hand to his. I was in the drawing-room. Villain! I am your master."

The palor spread up from Leicester's mouth to his temples, leaving a dusky ring around his eyes. For the first time in his life this man of evil and stern will was terrified. Yet wrath was stronger in his heart than fear, even then. His white lips curled in fierce disdain. He turned towards Adeline, who lay with her face buried in the silken pillows, conscious of nothing but her own unutterable wretchedness. She did not feel the fiendish glance that he cast upon her, but Jacob saw it, and his grey eyes kindled, till they seemed black as midnight: "If you wish to see another, come in here—come, I say. Victims are plenty about you—come in."

Jacob looked terribly imposing in this burst of indignation. His awkward form dilated into rude grandeur—his wrath, ponderous and intense, rolled forth like some fathomless stream, whose very tranquility is terrible. He flung his powerful arm around Leicester, and drew him forward as if he had been a child.

Through the dressing-room, still flooded with soft light and redolent of flowers, and into the bed-cham-

her beyond, Jacob strode, girding his companion firmly with one arm. He paused close by the bed. With an upward motion of his arms, he flung aside the cloud of lace that fell over it, and pointed to a form that lay underneath, pillowed, as it were, upon a snow drift. "Look—here is another," said Jacob, towering above the man who had been his master, for there was no stoop in his shoulders then, "look—it is your last victim—the very last."

Leicester did look, for his gaze was fascinated by the soft eyes lifted to his from the pillow; the sweet, sweet smile that played around that lovely mouth. It went to his soul—that impenetrable soul—that Adeline's anguish had failed to reach.

"She heard it all. She saw everything that passed between you and your wife," said Jacob.

"What—and smiles upon me thus?" There was something of human feeling in his voice. He stooped down, and put back some raven tresses that fell over the eyes that were searching for his.

Then the smile broke into a laugh so wild with insane glee, that even Leicester shuddered and drew back. Florence started up in the bed. The lace of her wedding garments was crushed around her form—her arms were entangled in the rich white veil which still clung, torn and ragged, to the diamond star fastened o'er her temple. The cypress and jessamine wreath, half torn away, hung in fragments among her black tresses. She saw that Leicester avoided her, and tearing the veil fiercely, set both her arms free. She leaned half over the bed, holding them out, as a child aroused from sleep, pleads for its mother. Leicester drew near, for a fiend could not have resisted that look. She caught both his hands, drew herself up to his bosom, and then began to laugh again.

That moment a female, whose black garments contrasted gloomily with the drift-like whiteness of the couch, came from a shadowy part of the room, and taking Florence in her arms laid her gently back upon the pillows. She had seen that of which Leicester and Jacob were unconscious—Adeline Leicester, standing in the gorgeous gloom of her dressing-chamber, and watching the scene."

"Mother, you here also," exclaimed Leicester, and his voice had, for the instant, something of human anguish in it. His mother pointed toward the dressing-room, and only answered—"would you drive her mad also?"

"Would to Heaven it were possible," answered Leicester, with a cold sneer. He bowed low, and with a gesture full of sarcastic defiance moved toward the dressing-room. Jacob followed him. "Stay," said Adeline, standing before them—"what is this—who are the persons you have left in my chamber?"

"One of them," answered Leicester, with calm audacity, "one of them is of little consequence, though you may find in her, my dear madam, an old acquaintance. The other is a young lady, very beautiful, as you may see even from here—to whom I had the honor of being married last evening. How she became your guest I do not know, but treat her with all hospitality, I beseech you, if it were only for the

love that I bear her—love that I never felt for mortal woman before."

"Go," said Adeline, stung into some degree of strength by his insolence, "or, rather let me go, if you are indeed the master here."

She took a shawl which had been flung across a chair, and folded it around her, "take all, but let me go in peace. Jacob, oh, my friend, you will not abandon me, now?"

"No," answered Jacob, with a degree of respectful tenderness that gave to his rude features something more touching than beauty. "Take off your shawl, madam—he has lost all power to harm you—there is desperation in his insolence, nothing more. His own crimes have disarmed him."

"How? how? Not that which he hinted—not marriage with another? Tell me—tell me, that it was only bravado. Rather, oh, much rather, could I go forth penniless, bareheaded, into the street."

She approached Leicester, holding out her hands. He saw all the unquenched love that shed anguish over that beautiful face, and took courage. In this weakness then, lay some hope of safety.

"Adeline, let me see you alone," he said, with an abrupt change of voice and manner. She looked at Jacob irresolutely. He saw the danger at once, and taking her hand, led her with gentle force into the bed-chamber. "Look," he said, pointing to Florence, who lay upon the couch—"ask her, she will tell you what it means."

Adeline advanced toward the old lady, who came to meet her as one receives the mourners who gather to a funeral.

"It is Leicester's mother," broke from the pale lips of Leicester's wife.

"Adeline—my poor daughter," said the old lady, wringing the trembling hand that Adeline held out.

"Will you—can you, call me daughter, oh, madam, how long is it since that sweet word has fallen on my ear." The pathos of her words—the humility of her manner—melted the old lady almost to tears. She opened her arms, and received the wretched woman to her bosom.

Jacob went out and found Leicester in the boudoir.

"Will she come? I am tired of waiting," he said, as Jacob closed and locked the door leading to the dressing-room.

"Expect nothing from her weakness—never hope to see her again. It is with me—not a weak, loving, forgiving woman you have to deal."

"With you—her father's clownish farmer-boy—my own servant."

"I have no words to throw away, and you will need them to defend yourself," answered Jacob, with firm self-possession. "You have committed, within the last twenty-four hours, two crimes against the law. You have wedded a woman, knowing your wife to be alive. I am the witness, I, her play-mate when she was a little girl, her protector and faithful servant in the trouble and sin which you have heaped upon her womanhood, I went with her to the hotel that night, I witnessed all—all—to the scene last evening. Let that pass, for it *should* pass, rather than have her history connected with yours before the world. But

another crime. This forged check—this attempt to ruin as brave, as warm-hearted, as honest a boy as ever lived. In this, her name cannot, from necessity, appear; for this you shall suffer to the utmost limit of the law; for this, you shall live year after year in prison, not from revenge, mark, but that she, Adeline Leicester may breathe in peace. You will leave this house, sir, very quietly, for I must not have a felon arrested beneath her roof. Go anywhere, at will, for a few hours, not to the hotel, for Robert Otis is waiting in your chamber with an officer; not to ferry, or steamboat, hoping to escape, men are placed everywhere to intercept you, but till noon you are safe from absolute arrest."

"I will not leave this house without speaking with Adeline," said Leicester, in a whisper so deep and fierce that it came through his clenched teeth like the hiss of a wounded adder.

"Five minutes you have for deliberation; go forth quietly, and as a departing guest, or remain to be marshalled out by half a dozen men, whom the chief of police has sent to protect the grounds, you understand, to protect the grounds."

Leicester did not speak, but a sharp, fiendish gloom shot into his eyes, and he thrust one hand beneath his snowy vest, and drew it slowly out; then came the sharp click of a pocket-pistol. Jacob watched the motion, and his heavy features stirred with a smile. "You forget that I am your servant, that I laid out your wedding dress, and loaded the pistol; put it up, sir. When I play with rattle-snakes, I take a hard grip on the neck."

Leicester drew his hand up deliberately, and dashed the pistol in Jacob's face. The stout man recoiled a step, and blood flowed from his lips. It was fortunate for him that Leicester had found the revolver, which he was in the habit of wearing, too heavy for his wedding garments. As it was, he took out a silk handkerchief, and coolly wiped the blood from his mouth, casting now and then a look at the tiny clock upon the mantle-piece. The fiendish smile, excited by the sight of his enemy's blood was just fading from Leicester's lip, when Jacob put the handkerchief back in his pocket.

"You will save a few hours of liberty by departing at once," he said. "To a man who has nothing but prison walls before him they should be worth something."

"Yes, much can be done in a few hours," muttered Leicester to himself, and gently settling his hat he turned to go.

"Open the door," he said, turning coolly to Jacob, "your wages are paid up to this time, at any rate."

Jacob bowed gravely, and dropping into his awkward way, followed his master down stairs. He opened the principal door, and Leicester stepped into the street quietly, as if respectful attendance had been real.

The morning had just dawned, cold, comfortless, and humid, a slippery moisture lay upon the pavements, dark shadows hung like drapery along the unequal streets; Leicester threaded them with slow and thoughtful step. For once, his great intellect, his plotting friend, refused to work. What should he do?

How act? His hotel, the very street which he threaded perhaps, beset with officers, his garments elegantly conspicuous, his arms useless, and in his pockets only a little silver and one piece of gold. Never was position more desperate, never, till then, had Leicester's bosom friend refused to convince him.

Hour after hour wore on, and still he wandered through the streets. As daylight spread over the sky, kindling up the fog that still clung heavily around the city, Leicester saw two men walking near him; he questioned his face, he loitered again, down one street and up another he turned, but still those two men kept in sight, their arms interlinked, their bodies sometimes moulded in the fog, but distinct or shadowy, those strange wanderers had a power to make Leicester's heart quail within him.

All at once he started, and stood up motionless in the street. That child—those two old people! He had recognized them at once the night before—he had glided away in the darkness to avoid them. What could the child be to him but an incumbrance? Those old people in the basement were old Mr. Wilcox and his wife, poor, friendless; he strove to cast them from his mind, to forget that they lived. The after events of that night had come upon him like a thunder-clap; in defending himself or attacking others, he had found no time to think of the discovery of his daughter and her old grand parents. Now, the thought came to his brain like lightning. He would secure the little girl—Adeline's lost child; the secret of her existence was his; it should redeem him from the consequence of his great crime. The old people were poor—they would give up the child to a rich father, and ask no questions. With this last treasure in his power, Adeline would not refuse to bribe it from him at any price. Herself-constituted guardian, too, that man of rude will, and indomitable strength, he who had sacrificed a life-time to the mother of this child, who had tracked his own steps like a hound, could he, who had given up so much, refuse to surrender his vengeance, also? This humble girl, from whom he had turned so contemptuously, how precious she became as these thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain.

Leicester proceeded with a rapid step to the neighborhood that he had visited the previous night. He descended to the area, glided through the dim hall, and entered the back basement just as old Mr. Warren, or Wilcox we must now call him, was sitting down to breakfast with his wife and grand-child. A look of poverty was about the room, warded off by care and cleanliness but poverty still—Leicester had only time to remark this, when his presence was observed. Old Mr. Wilcox rose slowly from his chair, his thin face grew pale as he gazed upon the elegant person of his visitor, and the rich dress, so strongly at variance with the place. A vague terror seized him, for he did not at once recognise the features, changed by time, and more completely still, by a night of agonizing excitement. At length he recognized his visitor, and sinking to his chair, uttered a faint groan.

Julia started up, and flung her arms around the old man's neck. Leicester came quietly forward.

"Have you forgotten me, sir?" he said, laying one hand softly upon the table.

"No," gasped the old man, "no."

"And the little girl, she seems afraid of me, but when she knows—"

"Hush," said the old man, rising, with one arm around the child, "not another word till we are alone. Wife, Julia, leave the room."

The old woman hesitated. She too had recognized Leicester, and she dreaded to leave him alone with her husband. Julia looked from one to the other, amazed and trembling.

"As you wish. I have no time to spare. Send them away, and we can more readily settle my demands and your claims."

"Go!" replied the old man, laying his hand on Julia's head.

His withered hand shook like a leaf.

Julia and her grandmother went out, but not beyond the hall; there they stood, distant as the space would permit, but still within hearing of the raised voices within. Now and then a word rose high, then old Mrs. Wilcox would draw Julia's head against her side, and press a hand upon her ear, as if she feared that even those indistinct murmurs should reach her.

While these poor creatures stood trembling in the hall, a strange, fierce scene was going on over that miserable breakfast-table. Leicester had been persevering and plausible at first—with promises of wealth, and protestations of kindness, he had endeavored to induce the poor old man to render up the child. When this failed, he became irritated, and with fiercer passions attempted to intimidate the feeble being whom he had already wronged almost beyond all hopes of human forgiveness. The old man said little, for he was terrified, and weak as a child; but his refusal to yield up the little girl never left him for a moment. "If the law takes her away, I cannot help it," he said, "but nothing else ever shall." Tears rolled down the old man's face as he spoke, but his will had been expressed, and the man who came to despoil him saw that it was immovable.

Despairing at last, and fiercely desperate, Leicester rushed from the basement. Julia and her grandmother shrunk against the wall, for the palor of his face was frightful. He did not appear to see them, but went quickly through the outer door and up to the side walk. Here stood the two men, arm in arm, ready to follow him. He turned back and retraced his steps with a dull, heavy footfall, utterly unlike the elasticity of his usual tread. Further and further back crowded the frightened females. The old man was so exhausted that he could not arise from the chair to which he had fallen. He looked up when Leicester

entered the room and said, beseechingly, "oh let me alone, for how miserable you have made us, and let us alone."

"Once more, once more I ask, will you give up the child?"

"No—no."

A knife lay upon the table, long and sharp, one that Mrs. Wilcox had been using in her household work. Leicester's eye had been fixed on the knife while he was speaking. His hand was outstretched toward it before the old man could find voice to answer. Simultaneous with the brief "no," the knife flashed upward, down again, and Leicester fell dead at the old man's feet. Mr. Wilcox dropped on his knees, seized the knife, and tore it from the wound. Over his withered hands, over the white vest, down to his feet, gushed the warm blood. It paralyzed the old man; he tried to cry aloud, but had no power. A frightful stillness reigned over them a few seconds, then many persons came rushing into the room.

CHAPTER XX.

A LIGHT shone in that pretty cottage—a single light from the chamber where Julia had robed Florence Nelson in her bridal dress. A bed was there, shrouded in drapery, that hung motionless, like marble, and as coldly white—glossy linen swept over the bed, frozen as it were over the outline of a human form. Death, death, the very atmosphere was full of death. On one corner of the bed, crushing the cold linen, wrinkled with her weight, Florence Nelson had seated herself, and with her black ringlets falling over the dead, sung to him as no human being ever sung before; sometimes she laughed—sometimes wept. Every variation of her madness was full of pathos, sweet with tenderness, save when there came from the opposite room a pallid and grief-stricken creature, with drooping hands, and eyes heavy with unshed tears. If this unhappy woman attempted to approach the bed, or even enter the room, Florence would spring up with the fierce cry of a wounded eagle, the song rose to a wail, then, with her waxen hands, she would gather up the linen in waves, over the dead, and if Adeline came nearer, shriek after shriek rose through the cottage. Thus poor Adeline Leicester, driven from the death-couch of her husband, would creep back to where his mother knelt in her calm, still grief. There, with her stately head bowed down, her limbs prone upon the floor, she would murmur—"oh God, help me. It is just—but help me, help me!"

THE END.

PALACES. AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1819, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 128.

CHAPTER XI.

It was two nights after Thanksgiving. Leicester had thrown himself upon a couch in his chamber. A little sofa-table was by his elbow, and upon it a small and richly chased salver overflowing with notes and letters. Most of them were unopened, for he had been absent several days, and it often happened that when he once knew a handwriting, and did not fancy the correspondence, letters remained for weeks unread, on that little table, even when he was at home.

But this morning Leicester seemed to have nerved himself to read everything that came to hand. Bills, letters heavy with red wax from the counting-room, and even dirty, square-shaped missives, stamped with keys or thimbles, passed successively through his hands. These coarse letters he took up first, sorting them out with his white fingers, and tossing aside with a smile of quiet contempt those more delicate notes with which they were interspersed, whose very envelops bespoke a dubious and meretricious errand. Rose-tinted and azure paper, glittering with gold and fancy seals, abounded there. These notes, breathing a voluptuous odor, and eloquent of that sentimental foppery from which deep, pure feeling recoils, Leicester flung aside in disgust. But when all the business letters were read, he selected from this perfumed mass three little snow white notes, traced in delicate characters, that seemed yet unsteady with the trembling hand that had written them. A single drop of pale green wax, stamped with a gem, held this envelop, and in all things these notes were singularly chaste, and unlike those he had left, so contemptuously, unread. He broke the seals coldly, and without the least display of feeling perused each note according to its date. The contents must have been full of eloquence, wild and passionate, for they brought the color even to his hardened cheek, and toward the last he became somewhat excited.

"By Jove, it is a pity these could not be published. How the creature writes—a perfect nightingale pouring forth her heart in tears. After all it is amusing to see down-right, earnest love like this. One—two—three—I wonder if there are no more?"

He began tossing over the notes again. "Yes, yes, here is another, like a snow drop in a cloud of butterflies. No, how is this? the seal black, the handwriting delicately rigid, that of my lady mother."

He spoke a little anxiously, and, unfolding the note, read the few lines it contained with a darkened brow.

"Ill—is she, poor girl, ill, and delirious at times,

unfortunate that; physicians must be called, nurses—all a torment and a plague. My friend Robert has been of little use here, after all: I did think his handsome face might have helped me softly out of the whole business. Now, here is the question—shall I go up—re-assure her—take her away from the old lady—brave her friends? No, it is not worth while; a bullet through the brain must be unpleasant, especially to a reflecting mind; and these haughty southerners make short settlements. Besides, I hate scenes. But then the girl is ill, has fretted herself to the brink of the grave. These are the very words—I wonder my stately mamma ever brought herself to utter anything so pathetic. Well, she *has* suffered, the worst is over. When all hope is extinguished she will find consolation, or die. Die, that would end all—but then death is so gloomy, and she does write exquisite letters."

His lips ceased to utter these cold thoughts, and falling back on the couch he closed his eyes, still holding the open note in one hand. It was painful to see how calm and passionless his features remained while he settled in his mind the destiny of one who had loved him so much. After some ten minutes he opened his eyes, turned softly on the couch, and laid down his mother's letter.

"No, I will not go near her," he said, "and yet this is another heart that I am casting away—another that has loved me. How soon—how soon shall I have need of affection? A whole life, conquest upon conquest, and yet never truly loved save by these two women. The first and the last. It is strange, but this moment my heart softens toward them both. What, a tear in Leicester's eye!" and with a look of thrilling self-contempt the bad man started up, scoffing at the only pure feeling that had swelled his bosom for months.

A waiter stood in the door. "Sir, there is a man below, who says you told him to call."

"What does he seem like?"

"A hack-driver. He says you employed him one rainy night, a long time ago, and ordered him to come again when he had news to bring!"

"What, a tall, awkward fellow, with a stoop in the shoulders—tremendous feet and hands?"

"That's the man, sir."

"Send him up, I did tell him to call."

A few minutes, and Jacob Strong stood in Leicester's chamber, self-possessed even in his exaggerated awkwardness, and with a look of shrewd intelligence which recommended itself to Leicester at once. In their previous acquaintance the man of the world had

applied solely to self-interest in the supposed hackman, and he hoped to make this rude, sharp intellect useful to himself. It would have been a strong contrast to one acquainted with them both, the deep, wily, elegant man of the world—the honest, firm, shrewd man of the people. These two were fettered together in the game of life, and though one was unconsciously looking upon his antagonist as an instrument, nothing more, and though the other was often compelled to grapple hard with his passions, that they might lead him to no false move—the game was a trial of skill worth studying.

"You told me to find out who the lady was and where she lived, sir; it took time, for these great people are always moving about, but I have done it."

"I was sure that you were to be depended on—my good fellow, there is your money; now tell me all about it. Who is she? Where does she live, and when have you seen her?"

Jacob took the offered piece of gold, turned it over in his palm as if estimating its value, and then laid it on the table before Leicester.

"I don't jist like to give up the money," he said, eyeing the gold with well acted greed; "but perhaps you will help me in a way I like better."

"How!—what can be better than money?" questioned Leicester. "I thought you Yankees considered the almighty dollar above all things."

"No, there may be things that we like better than that, though we do love to put down the root of evil whenever we can get seed, just as I wan't to plant that are gold eagle where it will bring a crop of the same sort."

"Oh, that is it!" said Leicester, laughing, "I thought there must be something to come. But do you remember the old proverb about a 'bird in the hand'?"

"Well, yes. It seems to me as if I did remember something about it," answered Jacob, putting his huge hand to his forehead, "'a bird in the hand is worth two in the brush,' isn't that the poetry you mean?"

"Yes, that is quite near enough; now tell me about this lady, and we will talk of the reward after. You found the number of the house?"

"No. It wasn't numbered, but that made no difference, she didn't live there; only staid one night. Besides she wasn't a lady, only kind of help, you know!"

"A governess or waiting-maid, I thought so," exclaimed Leicester. "Very well, where is she now?"

"Oh! she went away with the folks that she had been living with, up to Saratoga and about; then she come back, and they all went off together across the water, to where she came from."

"What, to Europe? Then that is the last of her! Very well, my good fellow, you have earned the money."

Jacob looked keenly at the gold, but did not take it.

"Perhaps," said he, shifting his weight from one foot to the other—"perhaps you can tell me of some one that wants a hired-man to drive carriage, or do almost any kind of chores. I'm out of work just now, and its costs everything to live here in York."

Leicester was interested. His personal habits rendered an attendant necessary, and yet he had of late been unable to supply himself with one that could at the same time be useful and discreet. Here was a person, evidently new to the world, honest, and with a degree of shrewdness that might be invaluable, ready to accept any situation that might offer. Could he but attach this man to his person, interest his affections, what more useful agent, or more serviceable dependant could be found? Still there was risk in it. Leicester with his lightning habit of thought resolved the idea in his mind, while Jacob stood looking upon the floor, inly a fire with intense excitement, but to all outward appearance steadily calm.

"You don't know of any one then?" he said, at last, with assumed indifference. "Well, I don't see how I shall get along."

Leicester looked at him searchingly. Jacob felt the glance, and met it with a calm, dull expression of the eye, that completely deceived the man who was trying with such art to read him to the soul.

"What if I were to engage you myself?"

"Well, now, I should be awful glad!"

"Do you read? Of course, what down Easter does not? But are you fond of reading?—in the habit of picking up books and papers?"

Jacob saw the drift of this question at once.

"Wal, yes. I can read a chapter in the Bible, or a piece in the English reader, I suppose, as well as most folks, though I haven't tried much late years. But then if you want a feller to read books for you, why I don't think we should agree. I was set agin them at school, and haven't got over it yet."

"You know how to write, of course?"

He made one of his shuffling bows, and began to brush his hat with the sleeve of his coat.

"You need not wait; we will talk about the wages to-morrow," said Leicester. "Meantime if you can gather any more information about—about the lady, you know it would be a praiseworthy introduction to your new duties."

Jacob bowed again and edged himself toward the door. "I will do my best, you may depend on it, sir. At what time shall I come to-morrow?"

"At ten or two, it does not signify. If I am not in wait!"

"I will!" muttered Jacob, when he found himself alone. "It is something to have learned how to wait, as you shall find my new master—*master!*" and Jacob laughed inly.

CHAPTER XII.

It had been a brilliant season in the fashionable world that year. Saratoga and Newport were perfect hot-beds of gaiety, splendor and trivial ambition. A thorough bred nobleman or two from England—a German countess—the greatest and most popular statesmen of our own land, had flung a dazzling splendor over these places. But even amid all this false life and *edat* there was one person whose dress, wit and beauty become the theme of general comment. She had taken rooms at Saratoga late in the season—accommodations for half a dozen servants—stabling

for almost as many horses, all was in preparation long before the lady herself appeared. There was something about this to puzzle and bewilder the most thorough bred gossip of a watering-place. The servants were foreign, and thoroughly educated to their vocation. When questioned regarding their mistress, they spoke of her without apparent restraint, and always as my lady, or the countess. But there was no title attached to the name under which the superb suite of apartments had been engaged. Mrs. Garden! Nothing could be more simple and unpretending. If there was a title behind it, as the indiscretion of the servants seemed to intimate, she was only the more interesting. Her servants had lounged about the United States a whole fortnight; her horses had been gently exercised by the grooms just enough to attract attention to their superb beauty, and to keep the spirit of gossip and curiosity alive. A lady's maid had for days been making a sensation at the servant's table by her broken English and Parisian finery. At last came the lady, very simply dressed, very quiet and self-reliant, neither courting attention nor seeming in the least desirous of avoiding it. She brought no letters, sought no introductions. The various fashionable cliques, with their reigning queens, seemed scarcely to attract the notice of this singular woman, though a mischievous smile would sometimes dawn upon her beautiful mouth, as some petty nonsense for superiority passed before her. A creature so calm, so tranquil, so quietly regardless of contending cliques and fashionable factions, was certain to become an object of peculiar attention, even though rare personal beauty, and all the appliances of great wealth had been wanting. The reputation of a title, the graceful repose of manners just enough tinged with foreign grace to be piquant, and, above all, the novelty of a face and position singularly unlike anything known at the Springs that season, could not fail to excite a sensation. If the lady had designed to secure for herself with one graceful fling a place among the *elite* of American fashion, she could not have managed more adroitly. But even the design was doubtful—she scarcely seemed conscious of the position after it had been awarded to her, and accepted it with a sort of graceful scorn at last, as if yielding herself to the caprice of others, not to her own wishes. In less than three weeks after her domestication at the Springs, this stranger, announced without introduction, without seeming effort, become the reigning belle and toast of the higher circles. Her dress was copied—her wit quoted—her manners become a model to all aspiring young ladies, and, with all her power, she was the most popular creature in the world, affable to all, gentle, unassuming to those whom other fashionable leaders were ready to crush with a look and wither by a frown. Haughty only when thrown in contact with assumption and innate coarseness, which soon shrunk from her keen wit and smiling sarcasms, she was feared by the few, but loved, nay, almost worshipped, by the many.

When the season broke up and the glittering waves of high life ebbed back to the cities, this woman had attained a power, a firm, social position, unassailable even by the most envious and the most daring. Still

she was as completely unknown as on the first day of her appearance. Of herself she never spoke, and from the strange serving-man who maintaining the most profound respect, always hovered about her, nothing but vague hints could be obtained. But these hints, apparently won from a simple and hesitating nature, always served to inflame rather than satisfy curiosity. One thing was certain. The lady had seen much of foreign life—had travelled in every penetrable country, and her wealth seemed as great as her beauty. More than this no one knew, and this very ignorance, strange as it may seem, added strength to her position. The way in which she shrouded herself had its own fascination. True, it might conceal low birth, even shame, but it had pleased the fashionable world to bury a high European title under all this mystery, and this belief the lady neither aided nor contradicted, for she seemed profoundly unconscious of its existence. With no human being had she become so intimate that a question on the subject might be directly hazarded. With all her graceful affability there was something about her that forbade all intrusive scrutiny. She came to Saratoga beautiful, wealthy, unknown. She left it a brilliant enigma, only the more brilliant that she was mysterious.

Mrs. Garden, for thus was the lady known, came to New York early in the autumn, and in the great emporium began a new phase of her erratic and brilliant life.

A mansion, in the upper part of the city, had been in the course of erection during the previous year. It was a castellated villa in the very suburbs, standing upon the gentle swell of a hill, and commanding a fine view both of the city, and the beautiful scenery that lies upon the North and East Rivers. A few ancient trees, rooted when New York was almost a distant city, stood around this dwelling, sheltering with their old and leafy branches the glowing flowers and rare shrubbery with which the grounds of considerable extent were crowded. This dwelling, so graceful in its architecture, so fairy-like in its grounds, had risen as if by magic among those old trees. Lavish was the cost bestowed upon it; rich and faultless was the furniture that arrived from day to day after the masons and artists had completed their work. Statues of Parian marble, rich bronzes, antique carvings in wood, and the most sumptuous upholstery were arranged by the architect who had superintended the building, and who received the most minute written directions from some person abroad.

When all was arranged, drawing-rooms, library, ladies' boudoir and sleeping chambers, that might have sheltered the repose of an Eastern princess, the house was closed. Those who passed it could now and then catch a glimpse of some richly painted sash through a half fastened shutter; and glowing through the hot-house windows might be seen a little world of exotic plants, dropping their rich blossoms to waste; while beyond, the walls were laden with fruit ripening in the artificial atmosphere. Grapes and nectarines falling from bough and vine, untasted, in the time of roses, or only to be gathered stealthily by the old man who had temporary charge of the grounds.

Thus everything remained close and silent, like some enchanted palace of fairy land week after week, till the autumn came on. Since the architect left it no person save the old gardener had ever been observed to enter even the delicate iron railing that encompassed the grounds. True, the neighbors to whom this dwelling had become an object of great interest, were heard to assert that at a time, early in the summer, lights had been observed one stormy night in the second-story, and even high up in the principal turret. Some even persisted that before it was quite dark, a close carriage had been driven up to the door and away again, leaving two or three persons who certainly entered the house. After that carriage wheels had more than once made themselves heard above the storm, rolling to and fro as if people were coming and going all night. But the next morning, when all the neighborhood was alive with curiosity, this dwelling stood as before, stately and silent, amid the old forest trees. The shutters were closed; the gate locked. Not a trace could be found proving that any human being had entered the premises. So the whole story was generally set down as an Irish fiction, though the servant girl who originated it, persisted stoutly that she had not only seen lights and heard the wheels, but had caught glimpses of a cashmere shawl within the door; and of a little barefooted girl, with a basket on her arm, coming out half an hour after and alone. But there stood the closed and silent house—and there was the talkative old gardener in contradiction of this marvelous tale. Besides carriages were always going up and down the avenue upon which the dwelling stood, and out of this the girl had probably found material for her fiction. Certain it was that from this time till autumn no being was seen to enter the silent palace.

Then in the first golden flush of autumn the house was flung open. Carriages came to and fro almost every hour. Saddle-horses, fancy phaetons, and an equipage yet more stately drove in and out of the stables. The windows, with all their wreaths of gorgeously tinted glass, were opened to the golden and hazy atmosphere. Grooms hung around the stables; footmen glided over the tessellated marble of the entrance-hall; and conspicuous among the rest, was one tall, awkwardly-shaped man, who came and went apparently at pleasure. His duties seemed difficult to define even by the curious neighbors. Sometimes he drove the carriage, but never unless the lady of the mansion rode in it. Sometimes he opened the door. Again he might be seen in the conservatory grouping flowers with the taste and delicacy of a professed artist, or in the hot-houses gathering fruit and arranging it in rich masses of color for the table. It was marvelous to see the beautiful effect produced by those great, awkward hands. The very japonicas and red roses seemed to become more glowing and delicate beneath his touch. But after the first week this man almost wholly disappeared from the dwelling. Sometimes he might be seen stealing gently in at nightfall, or very early in the morning; but his active superintendence was over, he seemed to be no longer an inmate, but one who came to the place occasionally to inquire after old friends.

But the mistress of all this splendor—the beautiful woman who sometimes came smilingly forth to enter her carriage, who sauntered now and then into the conservatory, blooming as the flowers that surrounded her—mature in her loveliness as the fruit that hung upon the walls bathed in the golden sunshine—who was this woman with her unparalleled attractions—her almost fabulous wealth? The world asked this question without an answer—for the Mrs. Garden of Saratoga, and the Adeline Leicester of our story, satisfied no curiosity regarding her personal history. She visited no one who did not first seek her companionship, and thus deprived society of its right to question her.

We who know this woman by her right name and in her true character, that of a disappointed, erring but still affectionate being, might wonder at her bloom, her smiling cheerfulness, her easy and gentle repose of look and manner, but that human nature is full of such contradictions, teeming with serpents absolutely hidden and bathed in the perfume of flowers. If Adeline Leicester smiled she was not the less sad at heart. If her manners were easy, and her voice sweet, it was habit—the necessity of pleasing others that had rendered these things a second nature to her, with one great, and, we may add, almost holy object at heart. She pursued it earnestly, while all the routine of life went on as if she had no thought of the world, and no pleasure or aim beyond the luxurious life which seemed to render her existence one continued gleam of Paradise. Hitherto we have seen this woman in the agony of perverted love—perverted, though legal, for its object was vile, and worship of a base thing is hideous according to its power. We have seen her bowed down with grief, grovelling to the very soil of her native valley in passionate agony! But these were phases in her life, and extremes of character which seldom appeared before the world.

It is a mistake when people fancy that any life can be made up of unmitigated sorrow. Even evil has its excitement and its gleams of wild pleasure, vivid and keen. The sting of conscience is sometimes forgotten; the viper buried so deeply in flowers that his presence is scarcely felt, till uncoiling with a fling he dashes them all aside withered by his hot breath, spotted with venom. This heart-shock, while it lasts, is terrible indeed; but again those who have no strength to cast forth the serpent, bury him in fresh flowers, and lull him to a poisonous sleep in some secret fold of the heart, till he grows restless and fierce again.

With all her splendor Adeline Leicester was profoundly unhappy. The deep under current of her heart always swelled with bitter waters. Let the surface sparkle as it would, beneath it tears were constantly sleeping. There is no agony like that of a heart naturally pure and noble, which circumstance, weakness, or temptation has warped from its integrity. To know yourself possessed of noble powers, to appreciate all the sublimity of goodness, and yet feel that you have undermined your own strength, and cast a veil over the beautiful through which you can never see clearly, this is deep sorrow—this is the darkness and punishment of sin. Oh! if we could but

now how evil is punished in the heart of the evil doer, charity would indeed cover a multitude of sins. Adeline Leicester was unhappy. The pomp—the adulation which surrounded her had become a habit, thus all the zest and novelty of first possession was gone, and these things seemed but the necessary accessories of existence, without gratifying the hungry cry of her soul.

At this period of her life the thwarted affections and warm sympathies of her nature became clamorous for objects of love. Her whole being yearned over the blighted affections of other days; matured love grew strong within her. She absolutely panted to fold the child, abandoned in a delirium of passionate resentment, once more to her bosom. But that child could nowhere be found. Her parents too—that proud, kind old man, who had loved her so—that meek and loving woman—had the earth opened and swallowed them up, it would have left as many traces by which to discover them. The time had been when this proud woman shrunk from meeting persons so deeply injured—but oh! how fervently loved. Now she absolutely panted to fling herself at their feet, and crave forgiveness for all the shame and anguish her madness had cast upon them? In all this her exertions had been cruelly thwarted; parents, child, everything that had loved her and suffered for her, seemed swept into oblivion. The past was but a remembrance, not a wreck of it remained save in her own mind. Another feeling more powerful than filial or maternal love—more absorbing—more ruthlessly adhesive, was the love she could not conquer, for the hardened man who had been the first cause of all the misery and wrong against which she was struggling. It was the one passion of a life-time—the love of a warm, impulsive heart—of a vivid intellect, and, say what we will, this is a love that never changes—never dies. It may be perverted—it may be wrestled with and cast to the earth for a time; but such love once planted in a woman's bosom, burns there so long as a spark of life is left to feed its vitality; burns there, it may be, forever and ever, a blessing or a curse.

To Adeline Leicester it was a curse, for it outlived scorn. It crushed her self-respect—it fell like a mildew upon all the good resolutions that, about this time, began to spring up and brighten in her nature. You would not have supposed that proud, beautiful woman so humble in her love—her hopeless love—of a bad man, and that man the husband whom she had wronged! Yet so it was. Notwithstanding the past: notwithstanding all the perfidy and cruel scorn with which he had deliberately urged her on to ruin, she would have given up anything, everything for one expression of affection, such as had won the love of her young heart. But even here, where the accomplishment of her wish had proved a punishment, her affections were flung rudely back.

And now, when all her efforts were in vain, when nothing could be found to accept her penitence, or return some little portion of the yearning tenderness that filled her heart, she plunged recklessly into the world again—but the arrow was in her side. She folded her silken robes over it, and strove to feed her great want with the husks of fashionable life; but to

those who feel and think, the very attempt thus to appease the soul's hunger is a mockery. Adeline Leicester felt this, and at times she grew faint amid her empty splendor. She had met with none of the usual retributions which are the coarser and more common result of faults like hers. No disgrace clung to her name: she had wealth, beauty, position, homage. But who shall say that the punishment of her sin was not great even then? Still this was but the silver edging to the cloud that had begun to rise and darken over her life. Her own proud, warm heart was doomed to punish itself.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACOB STRONG was alone in Mr. Leicester's chamber. His master had gone out hurriedly, and left the room in considerable disarray. Papers were scattered about loose upon the table. The small traveling desk which usually stood upon it was open, and on the purple lining lay an open letter, bearing a Southern post-mark, that had evidently arrived by the morning mail.

We do not pretend to justify our friend Jacob, though he is an especial favorite, in the course he pursued on that occasion. His reasons may possibly be deemed justifiable by the reader, but in our minds there still rests a doubt. Be this as it may, Jacob did take up the open letter and glance hurriedly over its contents: then he read it more deliberately, while a new and singular expression stole over his features. This did not seem quite sufficient gratification of his curiosity, for he even opened a compartment of the desk, and pursued his research among notes, visiting cards, bills and business papers for a good half hour, dotting down a hasty memorandum now and then with a gold and amethyst pen which he took from Leicester's inkstand. Then he read the open letter a third time, muttering over the words as if anxious to fix them on his mind by the additional aid of sound.

"That will do—that will clinch the matter; he will never let this escape!" he said, at last, re-placing the letter. "Cautious, subtle as he is, this temptation will be too strong. Then, then——"

Jacob's eyes flashed, he pressed the knuckles of one large hand hard upon the desk, and firmly shut his teeth.

That moment a stealthy tread was heard near the door. Jacob instantly commenced making a terrible noise and confusion among the chairs, and while he was occupied in setting things right after his awkward fashion, Leicester glided into the chamber. Remembering the letter, he had hurried back to secure it from the possible curiosity of his servant. But Jacob was busy with the furniture, muttering his discontent against the untidy chamber-maid, and seemed so completely occupied with an old silk handkerchief which he was flourishing from one object to another, that all suspicion forsook Leicester. He quietly closed the desk, therefore, and placing the letter in his pocket, sunk to an easy chair which Jacob had just left clouded in a dusky haze, while he commenced operations on a neighboring sofa.

Something more exciting than usual must have

occupied Leicester's thoughts, or, with his fastidious habits, he would not for a moment have endured the perpetual clouds of dust that floated over his hair and clothes, whenever Jacob discovered a new object upon which to exercise his handkerchief. As it was, he sat lost in thought, apparently quite unconscious of the annoyance, or of the keen glances which the servant now and then cast upon him.

"It will do," thought Jacob, gathering the duster up in his hand with an eager clutch, and while he seemed looking around for something to employ himself upon, those keen, grey eyes were bent upon Leicester's face. "I was sure of it, he has almost made up his mind. Let me hear the tone of his voice, and I shall know how!"

Jacob had not long to wait. After a reverie that was disturbed by many an anxious thought, Leicester turned in his chair, opened the little travelling desk and began to write, pausing now and then as if the construction of his language was more than usually difficult. The note did not please him. He tore it in two, and, casting the fragments upon the hearth-rug, selected another sheet from the perfumed paper that lay at his elbow. This time he was more successful. The note was carefully folded, sealed with a little antique seal, and directed in a light and flowing hand. Leicester smiled as he wrote, and his face brightened as if he had flung off a load of annoying doubts. "Here," he said, holding the letter over his shoulder with a carelessness that was certainly more than half assumed, "take this note and observe how it is received. You understand?"

Jacob took the snowy little billet and bent over it wistfully, as if the direction could only be made out with great effort.

"Well!" said Leicester, turning sharply upon him, "what keeps you? Surely you understand enough to make out the address?"

"Well, yes!" answered Jacob, holding the note at arm's length, and eyeing it askance, "it's rather too fine that ere hand-writing, but then I can manage to cipher it out if you give me time enough."

"Very well, you have had time enough. Go! and remember to observe all that passes when you deliver it."

Jacob took up his drab beaver, planted it firmly on the back of his head and disappeared, holding the note between his thumb and finger.

While our friend Jacob is making his way up town, we will precede him and enter the pretty cottage, which, with its fairy garden, has before been an object of description.

In the parlor of this exquisite but monotonous dwelling sat Florence Nelson. Cold as it was becoming she still wore the pretty morning dress of fine India muslin, with its profusion of soft lace, but over it was a scarf of scarlet cashmere, that gave to her cheek its rosy shadow, as a crimson camilla sometimes casts a trace of its presence on the marble urn against which it falls. But for this waving shadow her face was cold, white, and even traced with mournful lines, as if she had been suffering from illness or some grief unnatural to her youth, and weighing sadly upon her gentle nature. Her soft, brown eyes seemed misty

and dull by habitual tears, and the long, curling lashes seemed to have flung a deeper and deeper shadow on the cheek just beneath, for a faint circle, such as disease or grief often pencils, was becoming definitely marked around those sad and beautiful eyes. The imprint of many a heavy heart-ache might have been read in those shadowy circles; and the paler redness of a mouth that smiled still—but oh, how mournfully.

Florence sat by a sofa-table, one foot, too small now for the satin slipper that had so beautifully defined its proportions a little while before, rested upon one of the richly carved supporters. She had become painfully fragile, and the folds of her dress fell around her drooping form like a cloud, soft, white, and so transparent that but for the red scarf you might have defined the slender arms and marble neck underneath with startling distinctness. She was occupied with her drawing lesson, but even the pencil seemed too heavy for the slender and waxen fingers that guided it; and to one that understood the signification, there was something ominous in the bright, feverish tinge that spread over her palm, as if she had been crushing roses in that little hand, and might not hope to wash the stain away.

Robert Otis leaned over the unhappy girl. He too was changed, but not like her. The flesh had not wasted from his limbs; the fire of youth had not burned out prematurely in those bright eyes; but his look was unsettled, restless, nay, sometimes wild. His very smile was hurried and passed quickly away, all its soft, mellow warmth was gone. The change was different, but terribly perceptible both in the youth and the young girl.

It was no boyish passion which marked every feature of that noble face as it bent lower and lower over the drooping girl. Tenderness, keen, deep sympathy was there, but none of the ardent passions that had fired his whole being when only the semblance of that beautiful form first met his eye. If Robert Otis loved Florence Nelson, it was with the tender earnestness of manhood, not with the fiery ardor natural to his age and temperament.

"You seem tired; how your hand trembles; rest awhile, Miss Nelson. This stooping posture must be oppressive," said Robert, gently attempting to remove the pencil from the fair hand that could really guide it no longer.

"No, no," said Florence, raising her eyes with a soft, sad smile, "you do not give lessons every day now, and we must improve the time. When Mr. Leicester comes he should find me quite an artist, I must not disgrace you with my idleness. He would feel hurt if we did not meet his expectations. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps, I cannot exactly tell. Mr. Leicester is so unlike other men, it is difficult to decide what his wishes really are," said Robert. "He certainly did take great interest in your progress at first!"

"And now that interest has ceased! Is that what you mean to say, Robert?" questioned the young girl, and even the scarlet reflection of her shawl failed to relieve the deadly paleness of her countenance.

"No, I did not say that!" answered Robert, gently, "he questions me of your progress often."

Florence drew a deep breath, and now there was something more than a scarlet reflection on her cheek.

"But then," continued Robert, "he contents himself with questions; he does not come to witness the progress your are making."

"Then you have noticed it?—you have thought it strange?" said Florence, while the red upon her cheek began to burn painfully, and tears rushed to her eyes. "Yet you do not know—you cannot even guess how hard this is to bear!"

"Perhaps I can guess," answered Robert, casting down his eyes and trembling visibly.

Florence started from her chair and stood upright. In the violence of her agitation, she lost the languid, willowy stoop of frame that had become habitual. For a moment the full energies of her nature were lighted up, stung into sharp vitality by surprise and terror. But she did not speak, she only stood upright a single moment, and then sunk to the couch helplessly and sobbing like a child. Robert knelt by her greatly agitated, for he had anticipated no such violent effect from his words.

"Do not weep, Miss Nelson, I did not intend to pain you thus. What have I said?—what have I done that it should bring so much grief?"

She looked at him earnestly, and whispered in a low voice, while the lashes fell over her eyes sweeping the tears downward in fresh gushes. "What was it that you said? Something that you could guess, was not that it? Now tell me all you guess. What is it that you think?"

"Nothing that should overwhelm you in this manner," said Robert, struggling against the convulsions her agitation was calculated to produce. "I thought—I have long thought—that you were greatly attached to Mr. Leicester, more than a ward usually is to her guardian."

"And so, you are with him so much—and surely you did not think that my love—for I do not deny it, Robert—was unwelcome or unsought?"

Robert hesitated, he could not find it in his heart to give utterance to his thoughts.

"No, I did not think that," he said; "but Mr. Leicester is a strange man, so much older than we are, so much wiser. I can fathom neither his motives nor his feelings."

"And I—I have felt this so often—that is, of late," said Florence, "at times I am almost afraid of him, and yet this very fear has its fascination."

"Yes," answered Robert, thoughtless of the meaning that might be given to his words, "the bird shivers with fear even as the serpent lures it, and in this lies some subtle mystery, for while the poor thing seems to know its danger, the knowledge yields it no power of resistance. Here lies the serpent with its eyes burning and its jaws apart, exposing all its venom; but the spell works in spite of this."

"Hush! hush!" said Florence, with a look of terror, "this is a cruel comparison. It makes me shudder!"

"I did not intend it as a comparison," answered Robert. "With you it can never be one, and with me such ideas would be very ungrateful, applied to my oldest friend. I wish to Heaven no thought against him would ever enter my head again."

"Conquer them, never breathe them again!" said Florence, with sudden impetuosity. "They have killed me—those weary, base suspicions—not mine! not mine! Oh! I am so thankful that they were not formed in my heart!—they were whispered to me—forced on me. I would not believe them, but the evil thing is here. I have no strength to cast it out alone, and he never comes to help me."

"Perhaps he does not know how deeply you feel for him?" said Robert, anxious to console her.

Florence shook her head, and leaning forward, shrouded her eyes with one hand; after a little while she turned her gaze upon Robert and addressed him more quietly.

"You must not think ill of him," she said, with a dim smile. "See what suspicion and pining thoughts can do, when they have crept into the heart." The poor girl drew up the muslin sleeve from her arm, and Robert was startled to see how greatly the delicate limb was attenuated; tears came into his eyes, and bending down he touched the snowy wrist with his lips. "I must tell him that you are ill—that you suffer—surely, he cannot dream of this!"

"Not yet, we must not importune him; besides, I am becoming used to this desolate feeling. You will come oftener now. It is something to know that he has been near you—touched your clothes—held your hand—the atmosphere of his presence hangs about your very garments and does me good. This seems childish, does it not? but it is love. Sometime, when you have given up your being to another, this will seem less strange."

"I might have loved, young as you think me, even as you love this man," said Robert, annoyed, spite of his sympathy, by the words with which she had unconsciously applied to his youth; "but that which has wounded you saved me. You do not know, Miss Nelson, all that I have felt since the evening when Mr. Leicester brought me here. What I saw that night awoke me from the first sweet dream of passion. I could have loved you then, even as you love Mr. Leicester."

"Me!" said Florence, and a momentary smile lighted her eyes—as if the very thought of his young love amused her, sad as she was; "how strange! to me you seemed so young and embarrassed—a mere boy—now—"

"Now I am changed, you would say—now I am a different person—older, firmer, more self-possessed. Yet it is only a few months ago; I may seem older and less timid, for in this little time I have thought and suffered, but then I was more worthy of your love for I had not learned to distrust my oldest friend. Like you I have struggled against suspicion, and like you I have failed to cast it forth. It has withered your gentle nature—mine it has embittered."

"Ah! but you had not my temptation. It was not his own mother who poisoned your mind against him."

"His mother? I did not know that either of his parents were living."

"But she, this quiet, cold lady; the woman whom you have seen here. Did he never tell you that she was his mother?"

"He never even hinted it!" said Robert, greatly surprised.

"She told me so with her own lips: she warned me against him—she, his mother."

"Indeed!" said Robert, thoughtfully. "Yet with what coldness he received her!"

"It is not his nature," answered Florence, and her eyes filled with grateful tears. "To me her kindness has been unvaried; there is something almost holy in her calm, sweet nature: but for this I had not been so unhappy. Had I detected prejudice, temper, anything selfish mingled with her words, they would never have reached my heart, but now I cannot turn from her. With all her stately coldness she has something

of his power—I dare not doubt her. But I dare not believe the warning that she gave me."

Robert walked up and down the room. New and stern thoughts were making their way in his mind. Gratitude is a powerful feeling, but it possesses none of the infatuation and blindness which characterizes the grand passion. Suspicions that had haunted his conscience like crimes were beginning to shape themselves into stubborn facts. Still he would not yield to them. Like the gentle girl drooping before his eyes, he dared not believe anything against Edward Leicester. Humiliation, nay, almost ruin, lay in the thought.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

PALACES AND PRISONS.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1849, by Edward Stephens, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.]

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 195.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLORENCE had taken up her pencil again, but still remained inactive, gazing wistfully through the lace curtains, through which might be seen the little fountain flinging up a shower of spray amid flowers gorgeous with autumn tints and the crisp brown that had settled on the little grass plot. Notwithstanding the dahlias were in a glow of rich tints, and the chrysanthemums sheeted with snow white, rosy, and golden blossoms, there was a tinge of decay upon the leaves, very beautiful, but always productive of mournful feelings. Florence had felt this influence more than usual that morning, and now with her excited nerves there was something in the glow of those flowers, and the soft rush of water-drops, that made her heart sink. If the autumn and summer had been so dreary with all the warmth and brightness of sunshine and blossoms, what had the winter of promise to her? Spite of herself she looked down to the thin, white hand that lay so listlessly on the paper, and gazed on it till tears swelled once more against those half closed eyelids. "How desolate to be buried in the winter, and away from all——" These were the thoughts that rose and swelled in that young heart, and the objects that gave rise to them were flowers, autumn flowers, the richest and most beautiful things on earth. Thus it often happens in life, that lovely objects awake our most painful and bitter feelings, either by a mocking contrast with the sorrow that is within us, or because they are associated with the memory of wasted happiness.

As Florence sat gazing upon the half veiled splendor of the garden flowers, she saw a man open the little gate, and move with a slow, heavy step toward the door. The face was unfamiliar, and the fact of any strange person seeking that dwelling was rare enough to excite some nervous trepidation in a young and fragile creature like Florence.

"There is some one coming," she said, with a tone and look of alarm quite disproportioned to the occasion, addressing Robert, who was thoughtfully pacing the room. "Will you go to the door, I believe every one is out except us?"

Robert shook off the train of thought that had made him unconscious of the heavy footsteps now plainly heard in the veranda, and went to the door.

Jacob Strong did not seem in the least embarrassed, though nothing could be supposed further from his thoughts than an encounter with the young man in that place. Perhaps he lost something of the abrupt-

ness unconsciously assumed during his walk, for his mien instantly assumed a loose, almost slouching carelessness, such as had always characterized it in the presence of Leicester or his protegee.

"Well, how do you do, Mr. Otis? I didn't just expect to find you here! Hain't got much to do down at the store, I reckon?"

"Never mind that, Mr. Strong," answered the youth, good humoredly, "but tell me what brought you here. Some message from Mr. Leicester, ha!"

"Well, now you do beat all at guessing," answered Jacob, drawing forth the billet doux with which he was charged. "Ain't there a young gal a living here, Miss Flo— Florence Nelson? If that ain't the name I can't cipher it out any how!"

"Yes, that is the name—Miss Nelson does live here," said Robert. "Give me the note, I will deliver it!"

"Not as you know on, Mr. Otis," replied Jacob, with a look of shrewd determination. "Mr. Leicester told me to give this ere little concern into the gal's own hand, and I always obey orders though I break owners. Jest be kind enough to show me where the young critter is, and I'll do my arrand in less than no time and back agin!"

"Very well, come this way, Miss Nelson will receive the note herself."

Florence was standing near the window, her bright, eager eyes were turned upon the door, she had overheard Leicester's name, and it had thrilled through every nerve of her body.

Jacob entered with his usual heavy indifference. He looked a moment at the young girl, and then held out the note—Robert fancied that a shade of feeling swept over that usually composed face, but the lace curtains were waving softly to a current of air let in through the open doors, and it might be the transient shadows thus flung upon his face. Still there was something keen and intelligent in the glance with which Jacob regarded the young girl while she bent over the note. Suddenly he turned those keen, grey eyes, now full of meaning, and almost stern in their searching power, upon the youth himself. Robert grew restless beneath that stern scrutiny, the color mounted to his forehead, and as a relief he turned toward Florence. She was busy reading the note, apparently unconscious of the person, but oh! how wildly beautiful her face had become. Her eyes absolutely sparkled through the drooping lashes; her small mouth was parted in a glowing smile—you could see the pearly edges of her teeth behind the

bright red of lips that seemed just bathed in wine. She was trembling from head to foot, not violently, but a blissful shiver like that which stirs a leaf at noonday in the calm summer time, wandered joyously over her delicate frame. Twice, three times she read the note, and then her soft eyes were uplifted and turned upon Robert in all their glorious joy.

"See," she said, and her voice was one burst of melody—"oh! what ingrates we have been to doubt him!" In her bright triumph she held forth the note, but as Robert advanced to receive it she drew back. "I had forgotten," she said, "I alone was to know it, but you can guess—you can see how happy it has made me."

Robert Otis turned away somewhat annoyed by this half confidence. Florence, without heeding this, sat down by the table, and, with the open note before her, prepared to write, but her excitement was too eager, her hand too unsteady, after several vain efforts she took the note and ran up stairs.

Thus Jacob and Robert were left alone together. The youth, occupied with his own thoughts, seemed quite unconscious of the companionship forced upon him. He sat down on the couch which Florence had occupied, and, leaning upon the table, supported his forehead with one hand. Jacob stood in his old place regarding the varied expressions that came and went on that young face. His own rude features were greatly disturbed, and at this moment bore a look that approached to anguish. Twice he moved his person as if to approach Robert, and then fell back irresolute, at last he strode forward, and before the youth was aware of the movement, a hand lay heavily upon his shoulder.

"So you love her, my boy?"

Robert started. The drawling tone, the rude down East enunciation was gone. The man who stood before him seemed to have changed his identity. Rude and uncouth he certainly was, but even in this there was something imposing. Robert looked at him with parted lips and wondering eyes, there was something even of awe in his astonishment.

"Tell me, boy," continued Jacob, and his voice was full of tenderness—"tell me, is it love for this girl that makes you thoughtful? Are you jealous of Edward Leicester?"

Robert, lost all presence of mind, he did not answer, but sat motionless with his eyes turned upon the changed face bending close to his.

"Will you not speak to me, Robert Otis? You may, you should, for I am an honest man."

"I believe you are!" said Robert, starting up and reaching forth his hand, "I know that you are, for my heart leaps toward you. What was the question you put, I will answer it now? Did you ask if I loved Florence Nelson?"

"Yes, that was it, I would know, otherwise events may shape themselves unluckily. I trust, Robert, that in this you have escaped the snare."

"I do not understand you, but can answer your question a great deal better than I could have done three days ago. I do love Miss Nelson as it has always seemed to me that I should love a sister had one been made an orphan with me: I would do any

thing for her, sacrifice anything for her. Once I thought this love, but now I know better. Was there not another question, am I not jealous of Edward Leicester? I do not know, my heart sinks when I see them together—I cannot force myself to wish her his wife, and yet this repugnance is unaccountable to myself. He is my friend—she something even dearer than a sister, but my very soul revolts at the thought of their union. It was this that made me thoughtful: I do not love Florence in your meaning of the word: I am not jealous of Mr. Leicester, but God forgive me! there is something in my heart that rises up against him! There, sir, you have my confidence—I may be imprudent—I may be wrong, but it cannot be helped now."

"You have been neither imprudent nor wrong," answered Jacob, laying his hand on the bent head of the youth. "I am a plain man, but you will find in me a safer counsellor than you imagine, a wiser one—though not more sincere—than your good aunt."

"Then you know my aunt?" cried Robert, profoundly astonished.

"It would have been well had you confided even in her on Thanksgiving night, when you were so near confessing the difficulties that seem so terrible to you. A few words then might have relieved all your troubles."

"Then Mr. Leicester has told you—has betrayed me to—to his servant, I would not have believed it!" Robert grew pale as he spoke: there was shame and terror in his face: deep bitterness in his tone, that moment he was suffering the keen pangs which a first proof of treachery brings to youth.

"No, you wrong Mr. Leicester there, he has not betrayed you, never will, probably, nor do I know the exact nature of your anxieties."

"But who are you then? An hour ago I could have answered this question, or thought so. Now you bewilder me, I can scarcely recognize any look or tone about you—which is the artificial, which the real?"

"Both are real—I *was* what you have hitherto seen me years ago. I *am* what you see now, but I can at will throw off the present and identify myself with the past. You see, Robert Otis, I give confidence when I ask it—a breath of what you have seen or heard to-day repeated to Mr. Leicester would send me from his service. But I do not fear to trust you!"

"There is no cause of fear, I never betrayed any thing in my life—only convince me that you mean no evil to him."

"I only mean to prevent evil! and I will!"

"All this perplexes me," said Robert, raising one hand to his forehead—"I seem to have known you many years; my heart warms toward you as it never did to any one but my aunt."

"That is right, an honest heart seldom betrays itself. But hush, the young lady is coming, God help her, for she loves that man."

"It is worship, idolatry, not love; that seems but a feeble word, it gives one a heart-ache to witness its ravages on her sweet person."

"And does she feel so much?" said Jacob, with emotion.

Before Robert could answer, the light step of

Florence was heard on the stairs; when she entered the room Jacob stood near the door, holding his hat awkwardly between both hands, and with his eyes bent upon the floor.

"You will give this to Mr. Leicester," she said, still radiant and beautiful with happiness, placing a note in Jacob's hand—"here is something for yourself, I only wish it could make you as happy as—as—that it may be of use, I mean." Blushing and hesitating thus in her speech, she placed a small gold coin upon the note. Poor girl, it was a pocket-piece given by her father, but in her wild gratitude she would have cast thousands upon the man whose coming had brought so much happiness.

Jacob received the coin, looked at her earnestly for a moment, half extended his hand, and then thrust it into his pocket.

"Thank you, marm, a thousand times—I will do the errand right off!" and putting on his hat Jacob strode from the house, muttering as he cast a hurried glance around the little garden—"it seems like shooting a robin on her nest—I must think it all over again."

Robert would have followed Jacob Strong, for his mind was in tumult, and he panted for some more perfect elucidation of the mystery that surrounded this singular man. But Florence laid her hand gently on his arm, and drew him into the window recess: her face was bright with smiles and bathed in blushes. "You were ready to go without wishing me joy," she said, "and yet you must have guessed what was in that precious, precious note!"

Robert felt a strange thrill creep through his frame. He turned his eyes from the soft orbs looking into his, for their brilliancy pained him.

"No," he said, almost bitterly, "I cannot guess—perhaps I do not care to guess!"

"Oh! Robert, you do not know what happiness is: no human being ever was so happy before. How cold—how calm you are. You could feel for me when I was miserable, but now, now it is wrong: he charged me to keep it secret, but my heart is so full, Robert; stoop and let me whisper it—tell nobody, he would be very angry—but this week we are to be married!"

"Now," said Robert, drawing a deep breath, and speaking in a voice so calm that it seemed like prophecy—"now I feel for you more than ever."

The little, eager hand fell from his arm, and in a voice that thrilled with disappointment, Florence said, "Then you will not wish me joy?"

Robert took her hand, grasped it a moment in his, and flinging aside the cloud of lace that had fallen over them, left the room. Florence followed him with her eyes, and while he was in sight a shade of sadness hung upon her sweet face—but her happiness was too perfect even for this little shadow to visit it more than a moment. She sunk upon an ottoman in the recess, and, with her eyes fixed upon the autumn flowers without, subsided into a reverie, the sweetest, the brightest that ever fell upon a youthful heart.

CHAPTER XV.

PEN, ink and paper lay upon the table. The curtains were flung back, admitting the broad sunshine

that revealed more clearly than the usual soft twilight with which Leicester was in the habit of enveloping himself, the strong lines which time and passion, sometimes allowed to run wild, sometimes curbed with an iron will, had left on his handsome features. Papers were on the table, not letters, but scraps that bore a business aspect, some half printed, others without signature, but still in legal form as notes of hand are given.

Leicester took one of these checks—a printed blank, and gazed on it some moments with a fixed and thoughtful glance. He laid it gently down, took up a pen, and held the drop of ink on its point up to the light, as if even the color were an object of interest. He wrote a word or two, merely filling up the blank before him, but simple as this seemed, that hand, usually firm as marble, quivered on the paper, imperceptibly it is true, but enough to render the words unsteady. His face, too, was fiercely pale, if I may use the term, for there was something in the expression of those features that sent a sort of hard glow through their whiteness. It was the glow of a desperate will mastering fear. With a quick and scornful quiver of the lip he tore the half filled check in twain, and cast the fragments into the fire. "Am I growing old?" he said, aloud, "or is this pure cowardice? Fear, what have I to fear?" he continued, hushing his voice. "It cannot be brought back to me, a chain that has grown link by link for years will not break with any common wrench. Still if it could be avoided, the lad's loves me!—well, and have not others loved me?—of what use is affection if it adds nothing to one's enjoyments? If the old planter had left my pretty Florence the property at once, why then—but till she is of age, that is almost two years—till she is of age we must live."

Half in thought, half in words, these ideas passed through the brain and upon the lip of Edward Leicester. When his mind was once made up to the performance of an act, it seldom paused even to excuse a sin to his own soul, but this was not exactly a question of right and wrong: that had been too often decided with his conscience to admit of the least hesitation. There was peril in the act he meditated, peril to himself, this it was that made his brow pale, and his hand unsteady. During a whole life of fraud and evil doing, he had never once placed himself within the grasp of the law. His instruments, less guilty, and far less treacherous than himself, had often suffered for crimes that his keen intellect had suggested. For years he had entirely lived upon the fruit of iniquities prompted by himself, but with which no personal connection could ever be proved. Now his subtle forethought in selecting and training an agent who should bear the responsibility of crime while he reaped the benefit, had failed. The time had arrived when Robert Otis was, if ever, to become useful to his teacher. But evil fruit in that warm, generous nature had been slow in ripening. With all his subtle craft Leicester dared not propose the fraud which was to supply him with means for two years' residence in Europe.

There was something in the boy too clear-sighted and prompt even for his wily influence, and now

after years of training worthy of Lucifer himself, Leicester, for the first time, found his chosen instrument fail. Robert might be deluded into wrong—might innocently become his victim, but Leicester despaired of making him, with his bright intellect and honorable impulses, the principal or accomplice of an act such as he meditated.

A decanter of brandy stood upon the table, Leicester filled a goblet and half drained it. This in no way disturbed the pallor of his countenance, but his hand grew firm, and he filled up several of the printed checks with a rapidity that betrayed the misgivings that still beset him.

He examined the papers attentively after they were written, and, selecting one, laid it in an embroidered letter-case which he took from his bosom, the others he placed in an old copy-book that had been lying open before him all the time: it was the same book that Robert Otis had taken so stealthily from his aunt's stand-drawer on Thanksgiving night.

When these arrangements were finished, Leicester drew out his watch, and seemed to be waiting for some one that he expected.

Again he opened the copy-book and compared the checks with other papers it contained. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy him, for a smile gleamed in his eyes as he closed the book.

Just then Robert Otis came in. His step had become quiet, and the rosy buoyancy of look and manner that had been so interesting a few months before, was entirely gone. There was restraint, nay, something amounting almost to dislike in his air as he drew a seat to the table.

"You are looking pale, Robert; has anything gone amiss at the counting-house?" said Leicester, regarding his visitor with interest.

"Nothing!"

"Are you ill then?"

"No, I am well—quite well!"

"But something distresses you, those shadows about the eye, the rigid lines, about that mouth—there is trouble beneath them. Tell me what it is—am I not your friend?"

Robert smiled a meaning, bitter smile, that seemed strangely unnatural on those fresh lips. Leicester read the meaning of that silent reproach, and it warned him to be careful.

"Surely," he said "you have not been at F—street without your friend?—you have not indulged in high play, and no prudent person to guide you?"

"No!" said Robert, with bitter energy, "that once—that night I did play, how, why, it is impossible for me to remember. Those few hours of wild sin were enough, they have stained my soul—they have plunged me in debt—they have made me ashamed to look a good man in the face."

"But I warned, I cautioned you!"

Robert did not answer, but by the gleam of his eyes and the quiver of his lips, you could see that words of fire were smothered in his heart.

"You would have plunged into the game deeper and deeper but for me."

"Perhaps I should, it was a wild dream—I was mad—the very memory almost makes me insane.

I, so young, so cherished, in debt, and how—to what amount?"

"Enough—I am afraid," said Leicester, gently—"enough to cover that pretty farm, and all the bank stock your nice old aunt has scraped together. But what of that?—she is in no way responsible, and gambling debts are only debts of honor, no law reaches them!"

"I will not make sin the shelter of meanness," answered the youth, with a wild flash of feeling—"these men may be villains, but they did not force themselves upon me. I sought them of my own free choice; no, I cannot say that either, for Heaven knows I never wished to enter that den!"

"It was I that invited, nay, urged you!"

"Else I had never been there!"

"But I intended it as a warning—I cautioned you, pleaded with you."

"Yes, I remember, you said that I was ignorant, awkward, a novice—Mr. Leicester, your advice was like a jeer—your caution a taunt, your words and manner were at variance; I played that night, but not of my own free will. I say to you, it was *not* of my own free will!"

"Is it me upon whom your words reflect?" said said Leicester, with every appearance of wounded feeling. Robert was silent.

"Do you know," continued Leicester, in that deep, musical tone, that was sure to make the heart thrill—"do you know, Robert Otis, why it is that you have not been openly exposed?—why this debt has not been demanded long ago?"

"Because the note which I gave is not yet due!"

"The note—a minor's note—what man in his senses would receive a thing so worthless? No, Robert, it was my endorsement that made the paper valuable. It is from me, your old friend, Robert, that the money must come to meet the paper at its maturity."

Tears gushed into the young man's eyes, he held out his hand across the table, Leicester took the hand and pressed it very gently.

"You know," he said, "this note becomes due almost immediately."

"I know—I know. It seems to me that every day has left a mark on my heart; oh! Mr. Leicester, how I have suffered!"

"I will not say that suffering is the inevitable consequence of a wrong act, because that just now would be unkind," said Leicester, with a soft smile, "but hereafter you must try and remember that it is so."

Robert looked upon his friend: his large eyes dilated: and his lips began to tremble, you could see that his heart was smitten to the core. How he had wronged that man! tears of generous compunction rushed to his eyes.

"It will be rather difficult, but I have kept this thing in my mind," said Leicester. "To-morrow I shall draw a large sum, a portion must redeem your debt, but on condition that you never play again!"

Robert shuddered. "Play again!" he said, and tears gushed through the fingers which he had pressed to his eyes, "would you fear that a man who has been racked, would of his own free will seek the wheel again: but how am I to repay you?"

"Confide in me, trust me. Oh! Robert, the suspicion that were in your heart but an hour since, they will return."

Robert shook his head, and swept the tears from his eyes.

"No, no! even then I hated myself for them: now, oh! how good, how forgiving, how generous you are—I am young, strong, have energy. In time this shameful debt can be paid—but kindness like this—how can I ever return that?"

"Oh! opportunities for gratitude are never wanting: the bird we tend gives back music in return for care, yet what can be more feeble? Give me love, Robert, that is the music of a young heart—do not distrust me again!"

"I never will!"

Leicester wrung the youth's hand. They both arose.

"If you are going to the counting-room I will accompany you," he said; "my business must be negotiated with your firm."

"I was first going to my room," said Robert.

"No matter, I will walk slowly—by the way, here is your old copy-book, I have just been examining it. Those were pleasant evenings, my boy, when I taught you how to use the pen."

"Yes," said Robert, receiving the book, "my dear aunt claims the old copies as a sort of heirloom. I remembered your wish to see it, and so took it quietly away, I really think she would not have given it up even to you."

"Then she did not know when you took it away?"

"No, I had forgotten it, and so stole down in the night. She was sound asleep, and I came away very early in the morning."

"Dear old lady," said Leicester, smiling, "you must return her treasure before it is missed; stay, fold your cloak over it. I shall see you again directly."

Leicester's bed-chamber communicated with another small room, which was used as a dressing-closet. From some caprice he had draped the entrance with silken curtains such as clouded the windows; scarcely had he left the room when this drapery was flung aside, revealing the door which had evidently stood open during his interview with Robert Otis. Jacob Strong closed the door very softly, but in evident haste, dropped the curtains over it, and taking a key from his pocket, let himself out of the bed-chamber. He overtook Robert Otis a few paces from the hotel, and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Mr. Otis, that copy-book, my master wishes to see it again—will you send it back?"

"Certainly," answered Robert, producing the book.

"But what on earth can he want it for?"

"Come back with me, and I will tell you!"

"I will," said Robert; "but remember, friend, no more hints against Mr. Leicester, I cannot listen to them."

"I don't intend to hint anything against him now!" said Jacob, drily, and they entered the hotel together.

Jacob took the young man to his own little room, and the two were locked in together more than an hour: when the door opened Jacob appeared composed and awkward as ever, but a powerful change had come upon the youth. His face was not only

pale, but a look of wild horror disturbed his countenance.

"Yet I will not believe it," he said, "it is too fiendish. In what have I ever harmed him?"

"I do not ask you to believe, but to know. Keep out of the way a single week, it can do harm to no one."

"But in less than a week this miserable debt must be paid!"

"Then pay it!"

Robert smiled bitterly.

"How? by ruining my aunt? Shall I ask her to sell the old homestead?"

"She would do it—she would give up the last penny rather than see you disgraced, Robert Otis!"

"How can you know this?"

"I do know it, but this is not the question. Here is money to pay your debt, I have kept it in my pocket for weeks."

Robert did not reach forth his hand to receive the roll of bank-notes held toward him, for surprise held him motionless.

"Take the money, it is the exact sum," said Jacob, in a voice that carried authority with it. "I ask no promise that you never enter another gambling hall, you never will!"

"Never!" said Robert, receiving the money; "but how—why have you done this?"

"Ask me no questions now, by-and-bye you will know all about it, the money is mine. I have earned it honestly; as much more is all that I have in the world. No thanks! I never could bear them, besides it will be re-paid in time!"

"If I live," said Robert, with tears in his eyes.

"This week, remember—this week you must be absent. A visit to the old homestead, anything that will take you out of town."

"I will go," said Robert, "it can certainly do no harm."

And they parted.

Adeline Leicester fled from the keen disappointment which almost crushed her for a time, and sought to drown all thought in the whirl of fashionable life. Her reception evenings were splendid. Beauty, talent, wit, everything that could charm or dazzle gathered beneath her roof. She gave herself no time for grief, occasionally a thought of her husband would sting her into fresh bursts of excitement—sometimes the memory of her parents and her child passed over her heart, leaving a swell behind like that which followed the angels when they went down to trouble the still waters. Her wit grew more sparkling, her graceful sarcasm keener than it had ever been. She was the rage that season, and exhausted her rich talent in efforts to win excitement. She did not hope for happiness from the homage and splendor that her beauty and wealth had secured.

When all other devices for amusement failed to keep up the fever of her artificial life, she bethought her of a new project. Her talent, her wealth must achieve something more brilliant than had yet been dreamed of, she would give a fancy ball.

At first Adeline thought of this ball only as something that should pass like a rocket through the upper

as the thought grew upon her, she resolved to make this an epoch in her own inner life; the man whom she had loved, the husband who had so coldly trampled her to the earth in her seeming poverty—he should witness this grand gala—he should see her in the full blaze of her splendid career. There was something of proud retaliation in this: she fancied that it was resentful hate that prompted this desire to see and triumph over the man who had scorned her. Alas! poor woman, was there no lurking hope?—no feeling that she dared not call by its right name in all that wild excitement?

She sent for Jacob, and besought him to devise some means by which Leicester should be won to attend her ball, without suspecting her identity.

"Let it be superb—let it surpass everything hitherto known in elegance," she said, "he shall be here—he shall see the poor governess, the scorned wife in a new phase."

There was triumph in her eyes as she spoke.

"You love this man, even now in spite of all he has done?" said Jacob Strong, who stood before her while she spoke.

"No," she answered—"no, I hate—oh! how I do hate him!"

Jacob regarded her with a steady, fixed glance of the eye, he was afraid to believe her. He would not have believed her but for the powerful wish that gave an unnatural impulse to his faith.

"He may be dazzled by all this splendor—the knowledge of so much wealth will make him humble—he will be your slave again!"

Adeline glanced around the sumptuous array of her boudoir. Her eyes sparkled: her lip quivered with haughty triumph.

"And I would spurn him even as he spurned me in that humble room overhead, that room filled with its wealth of old memories."

Jacob turned away to hide the joy that burned in his eyes.

"Oh! my mistress, say it again. In earnest truth you hate this man—do not deceive yourself—do not deceive me. Have you unwound the adder from your heart? Did that night do its work?"

Adeline Leicester paused; she was ashamed to own even before that devoted servant, how closely the adder still folded himself in her bosom. She turned pale as death, but still answered with unfaltering voice, "Jacob, I hate him!"

"Not yet—not as you ought to hate him," answered Jacob, regarding her pallid face so searchingly that his own cheek whitened, "but when you see him in all his villainy, as I have seen him, when you know all!"

"And do I not know all—what is it you keep from me? Yet what can I learn more vile, more terrible than the past?"

"What if I tell you that within a month, Edward Leicester, your husband, will be married to another woman!"

"Married! married to another!—Leicester—my—" she broke off, for her white lips refused to utter another syllable. After a momentary struggle she started up—"does he think that I am dead?—does he hope that night had killed me?"

"He knows that you are living; but thinks you have returned to England."

"But this is crime—punishable crime."

"I know that it is."

A faint, incredulous smile stole over her lips, and she waved her hand, "he will not violate the law, never was a bad man more prudent."

"He will be married to-morrow night."

"And to that girl! why, does he love her so much? Has she beauty so overpowering? What has she to tempt Leicester into the crime?"

"Her father is dead. By his will a large property falls to this poor girl. The letter came under cover to Leicester: he opened it. After the marriage they will sail for the north of Europe—there the letter will follow them, telling the poor orphan of her father's death. How can she guess that her husband has seen it before!"

"But I—I am not dead?"

"But you love him, he knows that better than you do. Death is no stronger safe-guard than that knowledge. In your love or in your death he is equally safe."

"God help me, this is the truth, but I will not be a slave to this love forever. If this last treachery be true, my soul will loathe him as he deserves."

"It is true."

"But my ball is to-morrow night. He accepted the invitation. You are certain that he will come?"

"He accepted the invitation eagerly enough," said Jacob, drily; "but what then?"

"Why, to-morrow night—this cannot happen before to-morrow night—then I shall see him; after that—no, no, he dare not. You see, Jacob, it is in order to save him from deeper crime—and we must not sit still and allow this poor girl to be sacrificed—that would be terrible. It shall be prevented."

"Nothing easier. Let him know that the brilliant, the wealthy Mrs. Gordon is his wife; say that she has millions at her disposal; this poor girl has only one or two hundred thousand, the choice would be soon made."

"Do you believe it? can you think it was belief in my poverty, and not—not a deeper feeling that made him so cruel that night; would he have accepted me for this wealth?"

A painful red hovered in Adeline's cheek as she asked this question—it was shaping a humiliating doubt into words. It was exposing the scorpion that stung most keenly at her heart.

Jacob drew closer to his mistress; he clasped her two hands between his, and his heavy frame bent over her, not awkwardly, for deep feeling is never awkward.

"Oh, my mistress, say to me that you will give up this man—utterly give him up—even now you cannot guess how wicked he is; do not, by your wealth, help him to make new victims—do not see him and thus give him a right over yourself and your property, a right he will not fail to use—give up this ball—leave the city—this is no way to find that poor old man, that child—"

"Jacob! Jacob!" almost shrieked the unhappy woman, "do you see how such words wound and

rankle. I may be wild—the wish may be madness—but once more let me meet him face to face—”

Jacob dropped her hands, two great tears left his eyes and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

“How she loves that man,” he said, in a tone of despondency.

“Remember, Jacob, it is to serve another. What if thinking himself safe he marries that poor girl?” said Adeline, in a humble, deprecating tone.

“Madam!” answered Jacob, “do you know that the law gives this man power over you, a husband’s power, if he chooses to claim it?” Jacob broke off and clenched his huge hand in an agony of impatience, for his words had only brought the bright blood into that eloquent face: through those drooping lashes he saw the downcast eyes kindle.

“She hopes it! she hopes it!” he said, in the bitterness of his thought, “but I will save her—with God’s help I will save them both!”

When Adeline Leicester looked up to address her servant, he had left the room.

Among other things Jacob had been commissioned to procure a quantity of hot-house flowers, for the conservatories at Mrs. Gordon’s villa were to be kept in the full wealth of these blossoms, and Adeline was prodigal of flowers in every room of her dwelling, even when no company was expected. In order to procure enough for this grand gala evening, Jacob had resource to Mrs. Gray who trafficked at times in everything that has birth in the soil. Mrs. Gray was delighted with this commission, for it promised a rich windfall to her pretty favorite, Julia Warren. So after the market closed that day she went up to Dunlop’s and bargained for all the exotics his superb greenhouse could produce. She informed Julia of her good luck, and returned home with a warmth about the heart worth half-a-dozen Thanksgiving suppers, bountiful as hers always were.

The next day Julia was going up town, bearing a basket loaded with exotics on her arm. It was late in the afternoon, for the blossoms had been left on the stalk to the latest hour, that no sweet breath of their perfume should be wasted before they reached the boudoir they were intended to embellish.

It was a sweet task that Julia had undertaken. Loving flowers as she did, it was a delicious luxury to gaze down upon her dewy burden as she walked along, surrounded by a cloud of fragrance invisible as it was intoxicating. A life of privation had rendered her delicate organization keenly susceptible of this delicate enjoyment. It gratified the hunger of sensations almost ethereal. She loitered on her way, she touched the flowers with her hands, and every blossom was bathed in odor. Rich mosses of heliotrope, the snowy cape jessamine, clusters of starry daphna, crimson and white roses—with many other blossoms strange as they were sweet, made every breath she drew a delight. A glow of exquisite satisfaction spread over her face, her dreamy eyes were never lifted from the blossoms except when a corner was to be turned or an obstacle avoided.

“My girl, where are you going? Are those flowers for sale?”

Julia started, and looked up. She was just then

before a cottage house, laced with iron balconies and clouded with creeping vines, red with the crimson and gold of a late Indian summer. The garden in front was gorgeous with chain dahlias and other autumn flowers that had not yet felt the frost, and on the basin of a small marble fountain in the centre stood several large aquatic lilies, from which the falling water-drops rained with a constant and sleepy sound.

Julia did not see all this at once, for the glance that she cast around was too wild and startled. She clasped the basket of flowers closer to her side, and stood motionless. Some potent spell seemed upon her.

“Can’t you speak, child? are those flowers for sale?”

Julia remained gazing in the man’s face; her eyes, once fixed on those features, seemed immovable. He stood directly before her, holding the iron gate which led to the cottage open with his hand.

“No—no—if you please sir, they are ordered. A lady wants them.”

“Then they are not paid for—only ordered—come in here. There is a lady close by who may fancy some of those orange blossoms.”

“No, no, sir; the lady might be angry!”

“Nonsense! I want the flowers—not enough to be missed though—just a handful of the white ones. Here is a piece of gold worth half your load. Let me have what I ask, and I dare say your customer will give just as much for the rest.”

“I can’t, sir, indeed I can’t,” said Julia, drawing a corner of her little plaid shawl over the basket, “but if you are not in a hurry—if the lady can wait an hour—I will leave these and get some more from the greenhouse.”

The man did not answer, but, placing his hand on her shoulder, pushed the frightened child through the open gate.

“Let your customer wait—during the next hour you must stay here. It is not so much the flowers that I want as yourself!”

“Myself!” repeated the poor Julia, with white and quivering lips.

“Go in—go in—I want nothing that should frighten you. Stay—just now I remember that face. Remember, I am an old customer!”

“I remember,” answered Julia, and tears of affright rushed into her eyes.

“Then you know me again?—it was but a moment—how can you remember so long and so well?”

“By my feelings, sir—I wanted to cry then—I can’t help crying now?”

“This is strange! Young ladies are not apt to be so much shocked when I speak to them? No matter, I won’t loathe your flowers and your services just now: oblige me, and I will pay you well for the kindness.”

Julia had no choice, for as he spoke the gentleman closed the gate, and completely obstructed her way out.

“Pass on—pass on!” he said, with an imperative wave of the hand.

Julia obeyed, walking with nervous quickness as he drew close to her. The gentleman rang—a faint

noise came from within, and the door was opened by a quiet old lady in mourning.

"Then you have come—you persist!" she said, addressing the gentleman!

"Step this way a moment," he answered, in a subdued voice, opening the parlor door; "but first send this little girl up to Florence, if you still refuse, she must answer for a witness. Besides she has flowers in her basket, and my sweet bride would think a wedding ominous without them!"

"Ominous indeed!" said the lady, pointing with her finger that Julia should ascend the stairs. "Edward, I will not allow this to go on; to witness the sin would be to partake of it."

"Mother," answered Leicester, gently taking the lady's hand, while he led her to the parlor, "tell me your objections, and I will answer them with all respect. Why is my marriage with Florence Nelson opposed?"

"You have no right to marry—you are not free—cannot be so while Adeline lives."

"But Adeline is dead! Mother, say now if I am not free to choose a wife?"

"Dead! Adeline Wilcox dead! Oh, Edward, if this be true."

"If! It is true. See, here are letters bearing proof that even you must acknowledge."

He held out some letters bearing a European postmark. The old lady took them, put on her glasses, and suspiciously scrutinized every line.

"Are you convinced, mother, or must I go over sea, and tear the dead from her grave before your scruples yield?"

The old lady lifted her face: a tear stole from beneath her glasses.

"Go on," she said, in a deep, solemn voice—"go on, add victim to victim, legally or illegally, it scarce matters, that which you touch dies. But remember—remember, Edward, every new sin presses its iron mark hard on your mother's heart, the weight will crush her at length."

"Why is maternal love so strong in your bosom that Scripture is revised in my behalf? Must my iniquities roll back on past generations?" said the son, with a faint sneer.

"No, it is because in my own sin originates yours. Your father was a bad man, Edward Leicester, profligate, treacherous, fascinating as you are. I married him—woe, woe upon the arrogant pride—I married him and said, in wicked, self-confidence—'my love shall be his redemption.' My son—my son, you cannot understand me—you cannot think how terrible iniquity is when it folds you in its bosom. There is no poison like the love of a profligate—the fang of an adder is not more potent. It spreads through the whole being, it lives in the moral life of our children, I said—'my love is all powerful, it shall reform this man whom I love so madly.' I made the effort—I planted my soul beneath the Upas tree, and expected not only to escape but conquer the poison. Look at me, Edward, can you ever remember me other than I am—still, cold, hopeless! Yet I only lived with your father three years, before that I was bright and joyous beyond your belief. He died as he had lived.

Did the curse of my arrogance end there? No, it found new life in his son, his son and mine, I had blended my being with the poison of his. In you, Edward—in you my punishment embodied itself. Still I hoped, and strove against the evil entailed upon you, Heaven will bear me witness I struggled unceasingly, but as you approached maturity with all the beauty and talent of your father, the moral poison revealed itself also. Then the love that I felt for you changed to fear, and as one who has turned a serpent loose among the beautiful things of earth, I said, 'let my life be given to protect society from the evil spirit which my presumption has forced upon it.' It was an atonement acceptable of God. How many deserted victims my roof has sheltered you know—how many I have saved from the poison of your influence it is needless to say. This one, so gentle, so rich in affection, I hoped to win from her enthrallment, or, failing that, she might be resigned to the arms of death, more merciful, more gentle than yours. I have pleaded with her, warned her, but she answers as I answered when those who loved me said of your father, 'it is a sin to marry him!' Must she suffer as I have suffered? Oh! Edward, my son, turn aside this once from your prey, she is innocent—she is helpless—save her young heart from the stain that has fallen upon mine?"

"Nay, gentle mother, this is scarcely a compliment—you forget that I wish to marry the young lady."

How cold, how insulting were the tones of his voice—how relentless was the spirit that gleamed in his eyes. The unhappy mother stood before him, her pale hands clasped and uplifted, tears streaming down her face, and words of thrilling eloquence hushed upon her lips, that no syllable of his answer might be lost. It came, that dry, insolent rejoinder; her hands fell slowly down; her figure shrunk downward.

"I have done!" broke from her lips, and she walked slowly from the room.

"Madam, shall we expect you at the ceremony?" said Leicester, following her to the door.

She turned upon the stairs, and gave him a look so sad, so earnest, that even his cold heart beat slower.

"It is not important!" he muttered, turning back, "we can do without her; this little girl and the servant must answer, though I did hope to trust no one!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JULIA WARREN mounted the flight of steps in wild haste, as the caged bird springs from perch to perch when terrified by strange faces; then she paused in her fright, doubtful where to turn or what room to enter. As she stood thus irresolute, a door opposite was softly pushed open, and a fair, young face looked out. The eyes were bent downward; the cheek and temples, shaded with masses of loose ringlets, that admitting snowy glimpses of a graceful neck, and shoulders undressed save by these bright tresses, and a muslin dressing-gown half falling off and huddled to the bosom with a fair, little hand.

Imperceptibly the door swung more and more open,

till Julia caught the outline of a figure slender, flexible, and so fragile in its beauty, that to her excited imagination it seemed almost ethereal. Like a spirit that listens for some kindred sympathy, the young creature bent in the half open door. The faint murmur of voices from below rose and fell upon her ear. No words could be distinguished, nothing but the low, deep tones of a voice, familiar and dear as the pulsations of her own heart, blended with the strangely passionate accents of another. The gentle listener could hardly convince herself that some strange woman had not entered the house, so thrilling and so full of pathos was that voice, usually so calm and so cold.

Julia stood motionless, and holding her breath, she saw nothing but the outline of a slender person, the shadowy gleam of features through masses of wavy hair, but it seemed as if she had met that graceful vision before, it might be in a dream—it might be—stay, the young girl lifted her head, and swept back the ringlets with her hand. A pair of dark, liquid eyes fell upon the flower girl, and she knew the glance. The eyes were larger, brighter, more densely circled with shadows than they had been at the time that come back upon the child's memory, but the tender expression, the soft loveliness, nothing could change that.

The hand dropped from among the ringlets it held, away from that pale cheek, and a glow, as of freshly gathered roses, broke through them as Florence drew her form gently up, and stood with her eyes fixed upon the trembling intruder.

Julia came forward, changing color with every step.

"A gentleman, the lady I mean—I—I was sent up here. If they wan't the flowers for you I would not mind, though the other lady has spoken for them!"

Florence cast her eyes on the basket of flowers, a bright smile kindled over her face, and drawing the child into the chamber, she took the heavy basket in her arms, and, overpowered by its weight, sunk softly down to the carpet, still holding it in her lap. Thus with the treasure half buried in the white waves of her dressing-gown, she literally buried her face in the blossoms, while her very heart seemed to drink in the perfume that exhaled again in broken and exquisite sighs.

"And he sent them? how good, how thoughtful—oh! I am too, too happy!"

She gathered up a double handful of the blossoms, and rained them back into the basket. Their perfume floated around her, some of the buds fell in the folds of her snowy muslin, that drooped like waves of foam over her limbs. She was happy and beautiful as an angel gathering blossoms in some chosen nook of Paradise.

There was something contagious in all this, something that sent the dew to Julia's eyes, and a glow of love to her heart.

"I am glad—I am almost glad that he made me come in," she said, dropping on her knees that she might gather up some buds that had fallen over the basket—"how I wish you could have them all! He offered a large gold piece, but you know I could not take it. If we—that is if grandpa and grandma—were rich, I never would take a cent for flowers, it

seems as if God made them on purpose to give away."

"So they are not mine, after all?" said Florence, with a look and tone of disappointment.

"Yes—oh, yes, a few. That glass thing on the toilet, I will crowd it quite full, the prettiest too—just take out those you like best."

"Still he ordered them—he tried to purchase the whole, in that lies happiness enough." The sweet, joyous look stole back to her face again, that thought was more precious than all the fragrance and bloom she had coveted.

The door-bell rang. Florence heard persons coming from the parlor, she started up leaving the basket at her feet.

"Oh, I shall delay him—I shall be too late; will no one come to help me?" she exclaimed. "I dare not ask her, but you, surely you could stay for half an hour?"

"I must stay if you wish it: he will not let me go; but indeed, indeed, I am in haste. It will be quite dark!"

"I do not wish to keep you by force," said Florence, gently, "but you seem kind and I have no one to help me dress. Besides, she, his mother, will not stay in the room, and to think of being quite alone, with no bridesmaid—no woman even for a witness—it frightens me!"

"What—what is it that you wish of me?" questioned Julia, while a sudden and strange thrill ran through her frame.

"I wish you to stay a little while to help put on my dress, and then go down with me. You look very young, but no one else will come near me, and it seems unnatural to be married without a single female standing by."

Florence grew pale as she spoke; there was indeed something lonely and desolate in her position, which all at once come over her with overwhelming force. Julia, too, from surprise or some deeper feeling, seemed struck with a sudden chill; her lips were slightly parted, the color fled from her cheek.

"Married! married!" she repeated, in a voice that fell upon the heart of Florence like an omen.

"To-night—in an hour—I shall be his wife!" How pale was the poor bride as these words fell from her lips! How coldly lay the heart in her bosom! She bent her head as if waiting for the guardian angel who should have kept better watch over a being so full of trust and gentleness.

"His wife! *his*!" said Julia, recoiling a step, "oh! how can you—how can you?"

A crimson flush shot over that pale forehead, and Florence drew her form to its full height.

"Will you help me—will you stay?"

"I dare not say no!" answered the child. "I would not if I dare!"

Again the door-bell rang: "hush!" said Florence, breathlessly, "it is the clergyman, that is a strange voice, and he—Leicester—admits him. How happy I thought to be at this hour! but I am chilly, chilly as death; oh, help me child!"

She had been making an effort to arrange her hair, but her hands trembled, and at length fell helplessly down. She really seemed shivering with cold.

"Sit down, sit down in this easy-chair, and let me try," said Julia, shaking off the chill that had settled upon her spirits, and wheeling a large chair draped with white dimity, toward the toilet. Lights were burning in tall candlesticks on each side of a swing mirror, whose frame of filigree'd and frosted silver gleamed ghastly and cold on the pale face of the bride.

"How white I am; will nothing give me a color?" cried the young creature, starting up from the chair. "Warmth, that is what I want! My dress—let us put that on first—then I can muffle myself in something when you curl my hair."

She took up a robe of costly lace, rich with the art of Brussels. "Isn't it beautiful!" she said, with a smile, shaking out the soft folds. "He sent it." She then threw off her dressing gown and arrayed herself in the bridal robe; the exertion seemed to animate her; a bright bloom rose to her cheek, and her motions became nervous with excitement.

"Some arrange blossoms to loop up the tunic in front," she said, after Julia had fastened the dress; "here, just here!" and she gathered up a few folds of the soft lace in her hand, watching the child as she fell upon one knee to perform the task, for Florence was trembling from head to foot with the wild, eager excitement that had succeeded the chill of which she had complained, and could do nothing for herself. When the buds were all in place, Florence sunk into the easy-chair, huddling her snowy arms and bosom in a rose-colored opera cloak, for, though her cheeks were burning, cold shivers now and then seemed to ripple through her veins. The soft lining of swan's-down, which she pressed to her bosom with both hands, seemed devoid of all warmth one moment, and the next she flung it aside glowing with overheating. There was something more than agitation in all this, but it gave unearthly splendor to her beauty.

"Now—now," said Julia, laying the last ringlet softly down upon the bosom of the bride, "look at yourself, sweet lady, see how beautiful you are."

Florence stood up and smiled as she saw herself in the mirror, an angel from Heaven could not have looked more delicately radiant. Masses of raven curls fell upon the snow of her neck and her bridal dress. Circling her head, and bending with a soft curve to the forehead, was a light wreath of starry jessamine flowers woven with the deep, feathery green of some delicate spray that Julia had selected from her basket, because it was so tremulous and fairy-like. All at once the smile fled from the lips of Florence Nelson, a look of mournful affright came to her eyes, and she raised both her hands to tear away the wreath.

"Did you know it? Was this done on purpose?" she said, turning upon the child.

"What—what have I done?"

"This wreath, these jessamines, you have woven them with cypress leaves." Florence sunk into the chair shuddering, she had no strength to unweave the ominous wreath from her head.

"I—I did not know it," said the child, greatly distressed, "they were beautiful, I only thought of that. Shall I take them off, and put roses in the place?"

"Yes, yes—roses, roses, these make me feel like death!"

That instant there was a gentle knock at the chamber-door, Julia opened it, and there stood Mr. Leicester. The child drew back; he saw Florence standing before the toilet.

"Florence, love, we are waiting!"

He advanced into the chamber, and drew her arm through his. She looked back into the mirror, and shuddered till the cypress leaves trembled visibly in her curls.

"My beautiful—my wife!" whispered Leicester, pressing her hand to his lips.

What woman could withstand that voice, those words? The color came rushing to her cheek again, the light to her eyes: she trembled, but not with ominous fear. Those words, sweeter than hope, shed warmth, and light, and joy where terror had been.

"Follow us!" said Leicester, addressing the child.

Julia moved forward: a thought seemed to strike the bridegroom, he paused—

"You can write, at least well enough to sign your name?" he said.

"Yes, I can write!" she answered, timidly.

"Very well—come!"

The parlor was brilliantly lighted, every shutter was closed, and over the long window, hitherto shaded only with lace, fell curtains of azure damask, making the seclusion more perfect.

A clergyman was in the room: and Leicester had brought his servant as a witness. This man stood near the window, leaning heavily against the wall, his features immovable, his eyes bent upon the door. Julia started as she saw him, for she remembered the time they had met before upon the wharf, that most eventful day of her life. His glance fell on her as she came timidly in behind the bridegroom and the bride, there was a slight change in his countenance, then a gleam of recognition, which made the child feel less completely among strangers.

It was a brief ceremony; the clergyman's voice was monotonous; the silence chilling. Julia wept in silence, to her it seemed like a funeral.

The certificate was made out. Jacob signed his name, but so bunglingly that no one could have told what it was—Mr. Leicester did not make the effort. Julia took the pen, her little hand trembled violently, but the name was written quite well enough for a girl of her years.

"Now, sir—now please, may I go?" she said, addressing Leicester.

"Yes—yes, here is the piece of gold, I trust your employer will find no fault—but first tell me where you live?"

Julia told him where to find her humble abode, and hurried from the room. Her basket of flowers had been left in the chamber above; she ran up to get it, eager to be gone. In her haste she opened the nearest door; it was a bed-room, dimly lighted, and by a low couch knelt the old lady she had seen in the hall. Her hands were clasped, her white face uplifted, there was anguish in her look: but that tearless anguish that can only be felt after the passions are quenched. Julia drew softly back. She found her basket in

the next room, and come forth again, bearing it on her arm. She heard Leicester's voice while passing through the hall, and hurried out dreading that he might attempt to detain her.

Scarcely had the child passed out when Leicester came forth, leading Florence by the hand. He spoke a few words to her in a low voice: "try and reconcile her, Florence. She never loved me, I know that, but who could resist you? To-morrow, if she proves stubborn, I will take you hence, or, at the worst, in a few days we will be ready for our voyage to Europe."

Florence listened with downcast eyes. "My father, my kind old father! he will not be angry; he must have known how it would end when he gave me to your charge. Still it may offend him to hear that I am married, when he thinks me at school."

"He will not be angry, love!" said Leicester, and he thought of the letter announcing old Mr. Nelson's death. "But the good lady up stairs; you must win her into a better mood before we meet again; till then, sweet wife, adieu!"

He kissed her hand two or three times—cast a hurried glance up stairs, as if afraid of being seen, and then pressed her, for one instant, to his bosom.

"Sweet wife!" the name rang through and through her young heart like a chime of music. She held her breath and listened to his footsteps as he left the house, then stole softly up the stairs.

The clergyman went out while Julia was up stairs in search of her flowers. Jacob Strong left the parlor at the same time, but instead of returning, he let the clergyman out and, moving back into the darkened extremity of the hall, stood there, concealed and motionless. He witnessed the interview between Leicester and Florence, and, so still was everything around, heard a little of the conversation.

Before Florence was half way up the stairs he came out of the darkness and spoke to her.

"Only a little while, dear lady, pray come back; I will not keep you long."

Florence, thinking that Leicester had left some message with his servant, descended the stairs and entered the parlor. Jacob followed her and closed the door; a few minutes elapsed, possibly ten, and there came from the closed room a low cry, followed by a voice wild with passionate anguish. The door was flung open—the bride staggered forth and supported herself against the frame-work.

"Mother! mother! oh, madam!" Her voice broke and ended in gasping sobs.

A door overhead opened, and the old lady whom Julia had seen upon her knees came gliding like a black shadow down the stairs.

"I thought that he had gone," she said, and her usually calm accent a little hurried. "Would he kill you under my roof? Edward Leicester!"

"He is not here—he is gone," sobbed Florence, "but that man——" she pointed with her finger toward Jacob Strong, who stood a little within the door. He came forward, revealing a face from which all the stolid indifference was swept away. It was not only troubled but wet with tears.

"It is cruel—I have been awfully cruel," he said,

addressing the old lady—"but she must be told. I could not put it off. She thought herself his wife!"

"I am his wife!—I am his wife!—*his wife*, do you hear?" almost shrieked the wretched girl. "He called me so himself! You saw us married, and yet dare to slander him!"

"Lady, she is not his wife!" said Jacob, sinking his voice, but speaking earnestly, as if the task he had undertaken was very painful. "He is married already!"

"He told me—and gave me letters from abroad to prove it—that Adeline was dead!" The old lady spoke in her usual calm way, but her face was paler than it had been, and her eyes were full of mournful commiseration as she bent them upon the wretched bride.

"Then he *was* married—he has been married before!" murmured Florence, and her poor, pale hands fell helplessly down. The old lady drew close to her, as if to offer some comfort, but she had so long held all affectionate impulses in abeyance that even this action was constrained and chilling, though her heart yearned toward the poor girl.

"Madam, did you believe him when he said his wife was no more?" questioned Jacob Strong.

The old lady shook her head, and a mournful smile stole across her thin lips; pain is fearfully impressive when wrung from the heart in a smile like that. Florence shuddered.

"And you—you also, his mother!" burst from her quivering lips.

"God forgive me! I am," answered the old lady.

"Then," said Jacob Strong, turning his face resolutely from the poor, young creature, whose heart his words were crushing: "Then, madam, you have seen his wife?—you would know her again?"

"Yes, I should know her."

"This night, this very night, you shall see her then. Come with me; this poor young lady will not believe what I have said, come and be a witness that Mrs. Adeline Leicester is alive—alive with his knowledge. Two hours from this you shall see them together—Edward Leicester and his wife—the mother of his child—will you come? There seems no other way by which this poor child can be saved."

"I—I will go! let me witness this meeting," cried Florence, suddenly arousing herself, and standing upright. "I will not take his word nor yours. You slander him!—you slander him! If he has a wife let me look upon her with my own eyes."

The old lady and Jacob looked at each other. Florence stood before them, her soft eyes flashing, her cheeks fired with the blood, grief had driven from her heart.

"You dare not—I know it, you dare not!"

Still her auditors looked at each other in painful doubt.

"I knew that it was false!" cried Florence, with a smile of wild exultation. "You hesitate—this proves it. To-morrow, madam, I will leave this roof—I will go to my husband. The very presence of those who slander him is hateful to me. To-night! yes, this instant, I will go!"

"Let her be convinced," said the old lady.

The strong nerves of Jacob gave way. He looked at that young face, so beautiful in its wild anguish, and shrunk from the consequences of the conviction that awaited her.

"It would be her death!" he said, "I cannot do it!"

"Better death than that which might follow this unbelief."

The old lady placed her hand upon Jacob's arm, and drew him aside. They conversed together in low voices, and Florence regarded them with her large, wild eyes, earnestly, as a wounded gazelle might gaze upon its pursuers.

"Come!" said Leicester's mother, attempting to lay her hand upon the shrinking arm of the bride, "it needs some preparation, but you shall go. God help us both, for this is a fearful task!"

Florence was strong with excitement. She turned, and almost ran up the stairs. Jacob went out, and during the next two hours, save a slight sound in the upper rooms from time to time, the cottage seemed abandoned.

At length a carriage stopped at the gate. Jacob entered, and seating himself in the parlor, waited. They came down at last, but so changed, that no human penetration could have detected their identity. The old lady was still in black, but so completely enveloped in a veil of glossy silk, that nothing but her eyes could be seen. A diamond crescent upon the forehead, a few silver stars scattered among the sombre folds that flowed over her person, gave sufficient character to a dress that was only chosen as a disguise.

Florence was in a similar dress, save that every thing about her was snowy white. A veil of flowing silk had been cast over her bridal array, glossy and wave-like, but thick enough to conceal her features. Like the other costume, her dress was sprinkled with stars. That which represents the morning—of a larger size and sparkling with diamonds—gathered up the veil on her left temple, leaving it to flow, like the billows of a cloud, over her form, and downward till it swept her feet. Without a word the three went forth and entered the carriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE take the reader once more to the residence of Adeline Leicester; not as formerly, when the tempest raged around its walls and darkness slept in its sumptuous apartments, when sobs and groans, and the wail of tortured persons alone broke the gloomy stillness. Not as then do we re-visit the stately mansion, with its tall old trees, its turrets and its stained sashes, from which clouds and clouds of gorgeous light come pouring upon the bland autumnal air. So broad was the illumination, so rich the tinted rays, you might have seen to gather autumn flowers from the ground, even to the most shaded extremity. But the white dahlias were tinged of an amber hue in that rich glow; the wax-balls hung like drops of gold on the thickets, and the trees, to the depth of their ripe foliage, were luminous with rich light, blending with the still more gorgeous leaves.

Julia Warren approached this mansion with admiring wonder. It seemed like something she had read of in a fairy tale—the lamps gleaming like stars among the trees and in the thickets; the foliage so strangely luminous; the crisp glass tinged with a brownish and golden green. All these things were like enchantment to the child, she whose life had been in that dull, comfortless basement. She looked around in delighted bewilderment, the very basket upon her arm seemed filled with strange blossoms as she entered the lofty vestibule, and changed the richly hued atmosphere without for the flood of pure gas-light that filled the dwelling.

"Oh! here she is at last—why, child, what has kept you?" A pretty young woman, in a jaunty cap and pink ribbons, made this exclamation, while Julia stood looking about in her bewilderment. Her very dress, her quick, but graceful movements, had an imposing effect upon the child.

"Are you the lady?" she said.

"No—no!" answered the girl, with a pretty laugh, for the compliment pleased her. "Come up stairs, quick—quick, my lady has been so impatient."

They went up a flight of steps, the waiting-maid exchanging words with a footman who passed them, Julia treading lightly with her load of flowers. Her little feet sunk into the carpet at every step: once only in her life had she felt the same elastic swell follow her tread. Nothing could be more unlike than the dark mansion that rose upon her memory, and the vision-like beauty of everything upon which her eyes fell. The floors seemed literally trodden down with flowers. Rich draperies of silk met her eye wherever she turned. A door swung open to a touch of the waiting-maid. Julia remembered the room which they entered. The couch of carved ivory and azure damask—the lace curtains that hung against the windows like floating frost-work—the rich blue waves that fell over them, and, dearer than all, the marble Flora placed near the couch, bending from its pedestal with pure and classic grace, gazing so intently on the white lilies in its hand as if it doubted that the flowers were indeed but a beautiful mockery of nature.

Julia drew a quick breath as she recognized all these objects, but the waiting-maid gave her but little time even for surprise. She crossed the room and opened a door on the opposite side. They entered a dressing-room, leading evidently to a sumptuous bed-chamber, for through the open door Julia could see glimpses of rose-colored damask sweeping from the windows, and a snow white bed, over which masses of embroidered lace fell in transparent billows to the floor. The dressing-room corresponded with the chamber, but Julia saw nothing of its splendor. Her eyes were turned upon a toilet richly draped with lace, and littered with jewels; a standing-glass set in frosted silver, was lighted on each side by a small alabaster lamp, which hung against the exquisite chasing like two great pearls, each with perfumed flame breaking up from its heart.

It was not the sight of this superb toilet, though a fortune had been flung carelessly upon it, that made the child's heart beat so tumultuously, but the lady who stood before it. Her back was toward the door,

but Julia felt who she was, though the beautiful features were only reflected upon her from the mirror.

The lady turned. Her eyes were bent upon the diamond bracelet she was trying to clasp on her arm. Oh! how different was that face from the tear-stained features Julia had seen that dark night. How radiant, how more than beautiful she was now! Every motion replete with grace; every look brilliant with flashes of exulting loveliness!

How great was the contrast between that superb creature, in her robe of rich and glossy satin, heightened by the floating lustre of soft illusion lace, which seems, more than any fabric on earth, like a web of woven moonlight, and the humble child who stood there so motionless, with the flower basket at her feet, her hands folded in that little plaid shawl, her large eyes filled with wonder beneath the pink hood, now faded with much washing. Notwithstanding this contrast between the proud and mature beauty of the woman and the meek loveliness of the child, there was an air, a look, something indeed indescribable in one, which reminded you of the other. Adeline turned suddenly, and moved a step toward the child; a thousand diamond sparks flashed from the folds of her lace overdress as she moved; a wreath of trembling brilliants studded up the golden depths of her profuse tresses, but all the light of her diamonds was not more beautiful than the smile that broke over her features as she recognized the little girl.

"And so, you have found me again," she said, untying the pink hood, and smoothing the bright hair thus exposed with her two palms, much to the surprise of the waiting-maid. "Look, Rosanna, is she not lovely, with her meek eyes and that smile?"

The waiting-maid glanced her black eyes from the lady to the child: "beautiful! why, madam, the smile is your own!"

"Rosanna! cried the lady, "this is flattery; never again speak of my resemblance to any one, especially to a child of that age. It offends, it pains me!"

"I did not think to offend, madam; the little girl is so pretty—how could I?"

Adeline did not heed her; she was gazing earnestly on the little girl. The smile had left her face, and this made a corresponding change in the sensitive child. She felt as if some offence had been given, else why should the lady look into her eyes with such earnest sadness?

"What is your name?"

The question was given in a low and hesitating voice.

"Julia, Julia Warren."

"Yes, that is enough. Rosanna, never speak in this way again!"

"Never, if madam desires it? But the flowers: see what quantities the little thing has brought. No wonder she was late—such a load."

"True, we were waiting for the flowers; here, fill my bouquet holder—the choicest, remember—and let every blossom be fragrant."

Rosanna took a bouquet holder, whose delicate net work of gold seemed too fragile for all the jewels with which it was enriched, and kneeling upon the floor began to arrange a cluster of flowers. Her

active fingers had just wound the last crimson and white roses together, when a footman knocked at the door. She started up, and went to see what was wanted.

"Madam, the company are arriving; two carriages have set down their loads already."

Adeline had been too long in society for this announcement to confuse or hurry her, had no unusual cause of excitement arisen, but as it was, the superb repose, usual to her manner, was disturbed: "who are they? have you seen them before?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, madam, often."

"No stranger—no gentleman who never came before—you are certain?"

"None, madam."

There was something more in this than the usual anxiety of a hostess to receive her guests. "I am insane to loiter here," she murmured, drawing on her gloves; "he might have come—for the universe I would not miss his first look—the bouquet, Rosanna, and handkerchief, where is my handkerchief?"

"Is this it, ma'am?" said Julia, raising a soft mass of gossamer cambric and costly lace from the carpet, where it had fallen.

This drew Adeline's notice once more to the child. "Oh, I had forgotten," she said, going back to the toilet and taking up a purse that lay among the jewels, "here; I have not time to count it, take the money, but some day you must bring back the purse, remember."

She took her bouquet hastily from the waiting-maid, and went out, leaving the purse in Julia's hand. She crossed the boudoir and then turned back; "remember, the flowers are for these rooms," she said, addressing the maid, and waving her hand with a motion that indicated the bed chamber and boudoir. "Let me find them everywhere."

With this command she disappeared, leaving the doors open behind her. Julia drew a deep breath, as the gleam of her garments was lost in descending the stairs; turning sorrowfully away, her eyes fell upon the purse; several gold pieces gleamed through the crimson network. "What shall I do—these cannot be all mine? the flowers did not cost half so much."

"No matter," was the cheerful reply, "she gave it to you. It is her way; keep it."

The child still hesitated.

"If you think it is not all right, say so when you bring back the purse," said the maid, good naturedly. "Who knows but it may prove a fairy gift? I'm sure her presents often do."

Julia was not quite convinced, even by this kind prophecy. Still, she had no choice but obedience, and so, bidding pretty Rosanna a gentle good night, she stole through the boudoir and away through the front entrance, for she knew of no other; and folding her shawl close as she encountered crowds of brilliantly dressed people passing through the vestibule.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEICESTER went to his hotel after his marriage, for though he had accepted an invitation to the fancy ball

which was turning the fashionable world half crazy, matters more important demanded his attention. Premeditating a crime which might bring its penalty directly upon his own person, he had made arrangements to evade all possible chances of this result, by embarking at once for Europe with his falsely married bride. In order to prepare funds for this purpose, the project for which Robert Otis had been so long in training had been that day put in action. The old copy-book with its mass of evidence was—as he supposed—safe in Robert's apartment. The check, forged with marvelous accuracy, which we have seen placed in his letter-case, had in the morning passed into the hands of his premeditated victim, and that night the youth was to meet him with the money. Thus everything seemed secure. True, his own hands had signed the check, but Robert had presented it at the bank, he would draw the money. When the fraud became known, his premises would be searched, and there was the old copy-book bearing proofs of such practice in penmanship as would condemn any one—over and over again might the very signature of that forged check be found in the pages of this book, on scraps of loose paper, and even on other checks bearing the same imprint and on the same paper. With proof so strong against the youth, how was suspicion to reach the rich Leicester? Would the simple word of an accused lad be taken? and what other evidence existed?—none—none! It was a fiendishly woven plot, and at every point seemed faultless. Still Leicester was ill at ease. The consciousness that the acts of this day had placed him within possible reach of the law, was unpleasant to a man, in whom prudence almost took the place of conscience. The hour had arrived, but Robert was not at Leicester's chamber when he returned. This made the evil-doer anxious and restless. He walked the room, he leaned from the window and looked out upon the crowd below. He drank off glass after glass of wine, and for once, suffered all the poor tortures of dread and suspense which he had so ruthlessly inflicted on others.

All this time Robert Otis was in the building, waiting for Jacob Strong. That strange personage came at last, but more agitated than Robert had ever seen him; and well he might be; for half an hour before he had left Leicester's wretched bride but half conscious of her misery and yet so heart-rending in her grief. In an hour more he was to conduct her where she would learn all the sorrow of her destiny. Jacob had a feeling heart, and these thoughts gave him more pain than any one would have deemed possible.

"Here is the money, go down at once and give it to him, I heard his step in the chamber," he said, addressing Robert. "The count is correct, I drew it myself from the bank this morning."

"Tell me, is this money yours?" questioned the youth, "I would do nothing in the dark."

"You are right, boy; no, the money is not mine, I am not worth half the sum. I have no time for a long story, but, there is one—a lady, rich beyond anything you ever dreamed of—who takes a deep interest in this bad man."

"What, Florence—Miss Nelson?" exclaimed Robert.

"No, an older and still more noble victim. I had but to tell her the money would be used for him, and, behold, ten thousand dollars—the sum, he thought enough to pay for your eternal ruin. My poor nephew!"

"Nephew, did you say, nephew, Jacob?"

"You call me Jacob—Jacob Strong—Uncle Jacob—call me everything on earth for I have loved you, I have tried you—kiss me! kiss me! I haven't had you in my arms since you were a baby—and I want something to warm my heart. I never thought it could ache as it has to-night."

"Uncle Jacob—my mother's brother—I do not understand it, but to know this is enough!"

The youth flung himself upon Jacob's bosom, and for a moment was almost crushed in those huge arms.

"Now, that has done me a world of good!" exclaimed the uncle, brushing a tear from his eyes with the cuff of his coat, a school-boy habit that came back with the first powerful home feeling. "Now go down and feed the serpent with this money. You won't be afraid to mind me now."

"No, if you were to order me to jump out of the window I would do it."

"You might, you might, for I would be at the bottom to catch you in my arms! Here is the money, I will be in the drawing-room as a witness: it won't be the first time I can tell you."

Leicester started and turned pale, even to his lips, as Robert entered his chamber; for a sort of nervous dread possessed him, and in order to escape from this, his anxiety to obtain means of leaving the country had become intense. He looked keenly at Robert, but waited for him to speak. The youth was also pale, but resolute and self-possessed. "The bank was closed before I got there", he said, in a quiet business tone, setting a small leather box on the table and unlocking it, "but I found a person who was willing to negotiate the check. He will not want the money at once and so it saves him the trouble of making a deposit."

Leicester could with difficulty suppress the exclamation of relief that sprang to his lips, as Robert opened the box, revealing it half full of gold; but remembering that any exhibition of pleasure would be out of place, he observed with apparent composure, "you have counted it, I suppose. Were you obliged to exchange bills with any of the brokers, as I directed, to get the gold?"

"No, it was paid as you see it," answered the youth, moving toward the door, for his heart so rose against the man that he could not force himself to endure the scene a moment longer than was necessary.

"Stay, take the box with you," said Leicester, pouring the gold into a drawer of his desk, "I will not rob you of that." Robert understood the whole, a faint smile curved his lip, and, taking the box, he went out.

"No evidence, nothing but pure gold," muttered Leicester, exultingly, as he closed the drawer. "It is well for you, my young friend, that the holder of that precious document does not wish to present his check at once. Liberty is sweet to the young, and this

secures a few more days of its enjoyment for you—and for me—ah, there everything happens most fortunately; why a good steamer will put us half over the Atlantic before this little mistake is suspected.”

Leicester was a changed man after this, his spirits rose with unnatural exhilaration. “Now for this grand ball,” he said, aloud, surveying his fine person in the glass. “Surely a man’s wedding garments ought to be fancy dress enough. Another pair of gloves though; this comes of temptation; I must finger the gold forsooth.”

The ruthless man smiled and muttered such broken fragments of thought as he took off the scarcely soiled gloves and replaced them with a pair of still more spotless white. He was long in fitting them on his hand, he fastidiously re-arranged other portions of his dress: all sense of the great fraud, that ought to have borne his soul to the earth, had left him when the gold appeared. You could see, by his broken words, how completely lighter fancies had replaced the black deed.

“This Mrs. Gordon, I wonder if she really is the creature they represent her to be. If it were not for this voyage to Europe, now, one might—no, no, there is no chance.” Thus muttering and smiling, Leicester left the hotel.

The evening was very beautiful, and Leicester always loved to enter a fashionable drawing-room after the guests had assembled. He reflected that a quiet walk would bring him to Mrs. Gordon’s mansion about the time he thought most desirable, and sauntered on, resolved at any rate not to reach his destination too early. But sometimes he fell into thought, and then his pace became unconsciously hurried. He reached the upper part of the city earlier than he had intended, and had taken out his watch before a lighted window to convince himself of the time, when a timid voice addressed him—

“Sir, will you please tell me the name of this street?”

He turned and saw the little girl whom he had forced to become a witness to his marriage. She shrunk back terrified, on recognizing him. “I did not know—I did not mean it,” she faltered out.

“What, have you lost the way?” said Leicester, in a voice that made her shiver, though it was low and sweet enough.

“Yes, sir, but I can find it!”

“Where do you live? oh, I remember. Well, as I have time enough, what if I walk a little out of my way and see that nothing harms you?”

“No, no, the trouble!”

“Never mind the trouble. You shall show me where you live, pretty one, then I shall be certain where to find you again.”

Still Julia hesitated. “Besides,” said Leicester, taking out his purse, “you forget, I have not paid for robbing your basket of all those pretty flowers.”

“No!” answered the child, now quite resolutely. “I am paid. The poor young lady is welcome to them.”

Leicester laughed. “The poor, young lady, my own pretty bride, well I like that.”

Julia walked on. She hoped that he would forge

his object, or only intended to frighten her. But he kept by her side, and was really amused by the terror inflicted on the child. He had half an hour’s time on his hand, how could he kill it more pleasantly? Besides, he really was anxious to know with certainty where the young creature lived. She was one of his witnesses. She had, in a degree, become connected with his fate. Above all, she was terrified to death, and like Nero, Leicester, would have amused himself with torturing flies if no larger or fiercer animal presented itself. His evil longing to give pain was insatiable as the Roman tyrant’s, and more cruel, for while Nero contented himself with physical agony, Leicester appeased his craving spirit with nothing but the keen feeling, the sensitive heart-string.

“I live here,” said Julia, stopping short, before a low old house, breathless with the effort she had made to escape her tormentor. “Do not go any further, Grandpa never likes to see strangers.”

“Go on—go on,” answered Leicester, in a tone that was jeeringly good-natured, “grandpa will be delighted.”

Julia ran desperately down the area steps. She longed to close the basement door after her and hold it against the intruder, but as this thought flashed across her mind, Leicester stood by her side in the dark hall. She ran forward and opened the door of that poor basement room which was her home. Still he kept by her side. The basement was full of that dusky gloom which a handful of embers had power to shed through the darkness, for the old people, whose outlines were faintly seen upon the hearth, were too poor for a prodigal waste of light when no work was to be done by it.

“Is it you, darling, and so out of breath?” said the voice of an old man, who rose and began to grope with his hand upon the mantle-piece. “What kept you so long, poor grandma has been in a terrible way about it.” While he spoke the grating of a match that would not readily ignite, was heard against the chimney-piece.

“The gentleman, grandpa, here is a gentleman, he would come,” cried the child, artlessly. This seemed to startle the old man. The match would not kindle; he stooped down and touched it to a live ember; as he rose again the pale blue flames fell upon the face of his wife, and rose to his own features. The illumination was but for a moment, then the sodden wick began to fuse slowly into flame, but it was nearly half a minute before the miserable candle gave out its full complement of light. The old man turned toward the open door shading the candle with his hand.

“Where, child, I see no gentleman.”

Julia looked around. A moment before Leicester had stood at her side. “He is gone, he is gone,” she exclaimed, springing forward. “Oh, grandma, oh, grandpa, how he did frighten me; it was the man I saw on the wharf that day!”

CHAPTER XIX.

SPLENDID beyond anything hitherto known in American life was the ball, of which the reader has had

partial glimpses. But I have no room for description nor is it needful to the completeness of my story, that those lofty drawing-rooms, those open boudoirs, that matchless conservatory, approached through a noble picture gallery should be presented save in gorgeous masses as one sees a rich cloud in the twilight. In all that brilliant crowd our story deals with four persons only. The hostess, in all the lustre of her superb beauty; a singularly elegant man, out of costume, who was seen to address her two or three times in the crowd; and two characters, "Night and Morning," so completely veiled that no penetration could guess of their features. These characters hovered around one of these two persons all the time, not with any appearance of gay frolic, but with a sort of timid pertinacity—which, but for their singular costume, would have escaped observation. Many in the crowd remarked that the beauty of their hostess grew more dazzling, her speech and manner more wildly brilliant. Often this man, so striking in his appearance, so calm in his demeanor, joined the gay throng that surrounded her, but when he stole softly to her side and bent his head in addressing her, two only caught the import of his words. At this moment "Night and Morning" hovered close to them, though with their faces the other way. No one heard the faint groan smothered within the folds of that white veil—no one saw the steady arm of Night, as it was folded around and supported the frail Morning.

It was over at last. The saloon, the banquet hall, the conservatory, sleeping in the moonlight shed from many a sculptured vase—all were deserted; wax candles flared and went out in their silver sockets, garlands grew dim and shadowy in the diminished light, half a dozen yawning footmen glided about extinguishing wax lights, and turning off gas, but they seemed ghost-like and dreary, wandering through the vast mansion.

But Adeline Leicester felt no fatigue; she saw nothing of the gloom that was so rapidly spreading over the splendor of her mansion. Her boudoir was still lighted by those two pearl-like lamps. It was a dim, luxurious twilight, that seemed hazy with the perfume stealing up from a dozen snowy vases scattered through the drawing-room, the bed-chamber, and the boudoir. The doors connecting these apartments were ajar, but closed enough to conceal one room from the other.

Adeline entered the boudoir. Her steps were imperious; her cheek burning. Pride, anger, and haughty scorn swelled in her bosom, as she seated herself to wait. One of those mysterious revulsions of feeling that are so frequent to a passionate and ill-disciplined nature, had swept over her heart. For the first time in her life she felt disposed to sting the foot that had trampled so ruthlessly upon her. In that moment, all the strong love of a life time seemed kindling into fiery hate.

It was one of those hours when we defy destiny—defy our own souls. A few hours earlier and she could not have met him thus with scorn on her brow, rebellion in her heart. A few hours after she might repent in tears, but now she waited his approach without a thrill of pleasure or of fear. The very

memory of former tenderness filled her with self-contempt. The marble Flora stood over her—crimson roses and heliotrope had been mingled with the sculptured lilies in its hand. A few hours before she had stolen away from her guests, to place these blossoms among the marble counterfeits, for they breathed his favorite perfume; now, she sickened as the fragrance floated over her, and tearing them from the statue, tossed them amid a bed of coals still burning in the silver grate. She did not go back to the couch, but remained upon the ermine rug, with one arm resting upon the jetty marble of the mantelpiece. No footstep could be heard in that sumptuously carpeted house, but the proud spirit within her seemed to know when he stole softly forth from the conservatory, and approached the room where she was waiting.

Leicester was self-possessed; he had a game to play, more intricate, more difficult than his experience had yet coped with, but this only excited his intellect. With a heart of stone the nerves hold no sympathy, and are obedient to the will alone: and what had ever resisted Leicester's will?

But she also was self-possessed, and this took him by surprise. He moved toward the grate and leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, directly opposite her. She held a superb fan, half open, against her bosom: it was fringed deep with the gorgeous plumage of some tropical bird, but no tumult of the heart stirred a feather. She held it there, as she had often done that evening, when homage floated around her, gracefully and quietly waiting to be addressed. This mood was one he had not expected; it deranged all his premeditated plan of attack. Instead of reproaching him, with that passionate anger that pants for reconciliation, she was silent.

"Adeline!" The name was uttered in a voice that no heart that had loved the speaker could entirely resist. A faint shiver was perceptibly ruffling, as it were, the plumage of her form, but the proud woman only bent her head.

"Was it delicate—was it honorable to deceive your husband thus?" he said, "to grant him one interview after so many years, and then conceal yourself from his search under this disguise? I have sought for you, Adeline, Heaven only knows how anxiously."

She smiled a cold, incredulous smile, for well she knew how he had searched for her.

"You do not believe me," said Leicester, attempting to take her hand, but she drew back, pressing the fan harder to her bosom, till the delicately wrought ivory broke. The demon of pride grew strong within her. For the first time in her life she felt a knowledge of power over the man who had been her fate.

"Was I to seek you that your foot might be planted on my heart once more? Was I to offer my bosom to the serpent fang again and again? Have you forgotten our interview in the chamber overhead?—that chamber where I had hoarded every thing connected with the only happy months you ever permitted me to know—so full of precious memories I thought they would touch even your heart."

He attempted to speak, but she would not permit him. "I did not know you, notwithstanding past

experience. Your heart has blacker shades than I imagined! Not up there—not among objects holy from association with my child, should I have taken you, but here! here! do not these things betoken great wealth!" A scornful smile curved her lips, and she glanced around the boudoir.

There was one word in this speech that Leicester seized upon. "Your child, Adeline? Great Heaven! would you exlude me from all share even in the love of our child!"

Even this did not soften her, though she was fearfully moved at the mention of her lost infant. He saw this, and instantly his manner changed. "Why should I plead with you—why waste words thus?" he said, casting aside all affectation of tenderness:—"you are my wife—lawfully married—the mother of my child. If you have property, by the laws of this land that property is mine! I plead no longer, madam! Being the master of this house, if it is yours, my province is to command. Tell me, then? this wealth—for which people give their idol, Mrs. Gordon, so much credit—this mansion; are they real?—are they yours?—mine?"

The scorn that broke over Adeline's face was absolutely sublime.

"Yes," she said, "this wealth is mine, yours, if the law makes it so; but listen—then say if you will use it?"

She bent forward; her lips and cheek were pale as death, but across the snow of her forehead a crimson flush came and went, like an arrow shooting back and again.

"You asked me that night, in the room above, if I had lived in Europe as the governess of that man's daughter—the governess only—I answered, yes; a governess only. It was false! Every dollar of the millions I possess comes from this man; he bequeathed it on his death-bed, that I might not again become your slave!" The haughty air gave way as she uttered this confession; her limbs trembled so violently that she was obliged to lean heavily on the mantel-piece to keep from sinking to the floor. Pride, that treacherous demon, left her then, helpless as a child.

"This," said Leicester, with a stern, clear enunciation, "this in no way interferes with my claim on the property. Were it double, that would be poor atonement for the outrage to my affections—the disgrace brought upon my name."

She did not speak, but listened in breathless silence, trying to comprehend the moral enormity before her, with a confused sense that even yet she had not fathomed the black depths of his heart.

Leicester had paused, thinking that she would answer, but as she remained silent he spoke again, still calmly, and with measured intonation. "But that which you have confessed becomes important in another sense. If the law gives me your property, it also enables me to divest it of the only incumbrance that would be unpleasant. Your confession, madam, entitles me to a divorce."

"You would not—oh, Heavens, no!" gasped the wretched woman.

"Now you seem natural—now you are meek

again," he said, with a laugh that cut to the heart. "So, you thought to dazzle me with your wealth—wither me with haughty pride—fool! miserable fool!"

"Mercy, mercy! Will no one save me from this man!" shrieked the wretched woman, flinging her clasped hands wildly upward.

Leicester was about to speak again, something fearfully bitter—you could see it in the curve of his lip—but his cry had reached other ears, and while the taunt was yet unspoken, Jacob Strong entered the boudoir. Leicester gazed upon him in utter amazement, for he advanced directly toward Adeline, and taking the clasped hands she held out in both his, led her to the couch, trembling, and so faint that she was incapable of uttering a word.

"What is this! how came you here, fellow?" said Leicester, the moment he could break from the astonishment occasioned by Jacob's presence.

"My mistress called for help, and I came," was the steady answer.

"Your mistress—where, who?"

"This lady—your first wife! the other——"

"Villain! who are you?"

Jacob looked into his master's eyes with a steady and calm stare—"look at me, Mr. Leicester! I have grown since you saw me at old Mr. Wilcox's! No doubt you have forgotten the awkward boy who tended your horse, and pointed out the best trout streams for you? But I, I shall never forget! No angry looks, no frowns, sir! The rocks we climbed together would feel them more than I do."

"Go on—go on—I would learn more!" said Leicester, paling fearfully about the mouth. "You have been a spy in my service?"

"Yes—a spy! a witness—a keeper of your most dangerous secrets! I read the letter from Georgia—I have that old copy-book which was to have sent Robert Otis, my own nephew, to state prison. There is a check of ten thousand which I can lay my hand on at any moment—you comprehend! I saw it written—I saw it pass from your hand to his. I was in the drawing-room. Villain! I am your master."

The palor spread up from Leicester's mouth to his temples, leaving a dusky ring around his eyes. For the first time in his life this man of evil and stern will was terrified. Yet wrath was stronger in his heart than fear, even then. His white lips curled in fierce disdain. He turned towards Adeline, who lay with her face buried in the silken pillows, conscious of nothing but her own unutterable wretchedness. She did not feel the fiendish glance that he cast upon her, but Jacob saw it, and his grey eyes kindled, till they seemed black as midnight: "If you wish to see another, come in here—come, I say. Victims are plenty about you—come in."

Jacob looked terribly imposing in this burst of indignation. His awkward form dilated into rude grandeur—his wrath, ponderous and intense, rolled forth like some fathomless stream, whose very tranquility is terrible. He flung his powerful arm around Leicester, and drew him forward as if he had been a child.

Through the dressing-room, still flooded with soft light and redolent of flowers, and into the bed-cham-

her beyond, Jacob strode, girding his companion firmly with one arm. He paused close by the bed. With an upward motion of his arms, he flung aside the cloud of lace that fell over it, and pointed to a form that lay underneath, pillowed, as it were, upon a snow drift. "Look—here is another," said Jacob, towering above the man who had been his master, for there was no stoop in his shoulders then, "look—it is your last victim—the very last."

Leicester did look, for his gaze was fascinated by the soft eyes lifted to his from the pillow; the sweet, sweet smile that played around that lovely mouth. It went to his soul—that impenetrable soul—that Adeline's anguish had failed to reach.

"She heard it all. She saw everything that passed between you and your wife," said Jacob.

"What—and smiles upon me thus?" There was something of human feeling in his voice. He stooped down, and put back some raven tresses that fell over the eyes that were searching for his.

Then the smile broke into a laugh so wild with insane glee, that even Leicester shuddered and drew back. Florence started up in the bed. The lace of her wedding garments was crushed around her form—her arms were entangled in the rich white veil which still clung, torn and ragged, to the diamond star fastened o'er her temple. The cypress and jessamine wreath, half torn away, hung in fragments among her black tresses. She saw that Leicester avoided her, and tearing the veil fiercely, set both her arms free. She leaned half over the bed, holding them out, as a child aroused from sleep, pleads for its mother. Leicester drew near, for a fiend could not have resisted that look. She caught both his hands, drew herself up to his bosom, and then began to laugh again.

That moment a female, whose black garments contrasted gloomily with the drift-like whiteness of the couch, came from a shadowy part of the room, and taking Florence in her arms laid her gently back upon the pillows. She had seen that of which Leicester and Jacob were unconscious—Adeline Leicester, standing in the gorgeous gloom of her dressing-chamber, and watching the scene."

"Mother, you here also," exclaimed Leicester, and his voice had, for the instant, something of human anguish in it. His mother pointed toward the dressing-room, and only answered—"would you drive her mad also?"

"Would to Heaven it were possible," answered Leicester, with a cold sneer. He bowed low, and with a gesture full of sarcastic defiance moved toward the dressing-room. Jacob followed him. "Stay," said Adeline, standing before them—"what is this—who are the persons you have left in my chamber?"

"One of them," answered Leicester, with calm audacity, "one of them is of little consequence, though you may find in her, my dear madam, an old acquaintance. The other is a young lady, very beautiful, as you may see even from here—to whom I had the honor of being married last evening. How she became your guest I do not know, but treat her with all hospitality, I beseech you, if it were only for the

love that I bear her—love that I never felt for mortal woman before."

"Go," said Adeline, stung into some degree of strength by his insolence, "or, rather let me go, if you are indeed the master here."

She took a shawl which had been flung across a chair, and folded it around her, "take all, but let me go in peace. Jacob, oh, my friend, you will not abandon me, now?"

"No," answered Jacob, with a degree of respectful tenderness that gave to his rude features something more touching than beauty. "Take off your shawl, madam—he has lost all power to harm you—there is desperation in his insolence, nothing more. His own crimes have disarmed him."

"How? how? Not that which he hinted—not marriage with another? Tell me—tell me, that it was only bravado. Rather, oh, much rather, could I go forth penniless, bareheaded, into the street."

She approached Leicester, holding out her hands. He saw all the unquenched love that shed anguish over that beautiful face, and took courage. In this weakness then, lay some hope of safety.

"Adeline, let me see you alone," he said, with an abrupt change of voice and manner. She looked at Jacob irresolutely. He saw the danger at once, and taking her hand, led her with gentle force into the bed-chamber. "Look," he said, pointing to Florence, who lay upon the couch—"ask her, she will tell you what it means."

Adeline advanced toward the old lady, who came to meet her as one receives the mourners who gather to a funeral.

"It is Leicester's mother," broke from the pale lips of Leicester's wife.

"Adeline—my poor daughter," said the old lady, wringing the trembling hand that Adeline held out.

"Will you—can you, call me daughter, oh, madam, how long is it since that sweet word has fallen on my ear." The pathos of her words—the humility of her manner—melted the old lady almost to tears. She opened her arms, and received the wretched woman to her bosom.

Jacob went out and found Leicester in the boudoir.

"Will she come? I am tired of waiting," he said, as Jacob closed and locked the door leading to the dressing-room.

"Expect nothing from her weakness—never hope to see her again. It is with me—not a weak, loving, forgiving woman you have to deal."

"With you—her father's clownish farmer-boy—my own servant."

"I have no words to throw away, and you will need them to defend yourself," answered Jacob, with firm self-possession. "You have committed, within the last twenty-four hours, two crimes against the law. You have wedded a woman, knowing your wife to be alive. I am the witness, I, her play-mate when she was a little girl, her protector and faithful servant in the trouble and sin which you have heaped upon her womanhood, I went with her to the hotel that night, I witnessed all—all—to the scene last evening. Let that pass, for it *should* pass, rather than have her history connected with yours before the world. But

another crime. This forged check—this attempt to ruin as brave, as warm-hearted, as honest a boy as ever lived. In this, her name cannot, from necessity, appear; for this you shall suffer to the utmost limit of the law; for this, you shall live year after year in prison, not from revenge, mark, but that she, Adeline Leicester may breathe in peace. You will leave this house, sir, very quietly, for I must not have a felon arrested beneath her roof. Go anywhere, at will, for a few hours, not to the hotel, for Robert Otis is waiting in your chamber with an officer; not to ferry, or steamboat, hoping to escape, men are placed everywhere to intercept you, but till noon you are safe from absolute arrest."

"I will not leave this house without speaking with Adeline," said Leicester, in a whisper so deep and fierce that it came through his clenched teeth like the hiss of a wounded adder.

"Five minutes you have for deliberation; go forth quietly, and as a departing guest, or remain to be marshalled out by half a dozen men, whom the chief of police has sent to protect the grounds, you understand, to protect the grounds."

Leicester did not speak, but a sharp, fiendish gloom shot into his eyes, and he thrust one hand beneath his snowy vest, and drew it slowly out; then came the sharp click of a pocket-pistol. Jacob watched the motion, and his heavy features stirred with a smile. "You forget that I am your servant, that I laid out your wedding dress, and loaded the pistol; put it up, sir. When I play with rattle-snakes, I take a hard grip on the neck."

Leicester drew his hand up deliberately, and dashed the pistol in Jacob's face. The stout man recoiled a step, and blood flowed from his lips. It was fortunate for him that Leicester had found the revolver, which he was in the habit of wearing, too heavy for his wedding garments. As it was, he took out a silk handkerchief, and coolly wiped the blood from his mouth, casting now and then a look at the tiny clock upon the mantle-piece. The fiendish smile, excited by the sight of his enemy's blood was just fading from Leicester's lip, when Jacob put the handkerchief back in his pocket.

"You will save a few hours of liberty by departing at once," he said. "To a man who has nothing but prison walls before him they should be worth something."

"Yes, much can be done in a few hours," muttered Leicester to himself, and gently settling his hat he turned to go.

"Open the door," he said, turning coolly to Jacob, "your wages are paid up to this time, at any rate."

Jacob bowed gravely, and dropping into his awkward way, followed his master down stairs. He opened the principal door, and Leicester stepped into the street quietly, as if respectful attendance had been real.

The morning had just dawned, cold, comfortless, and humid, a slippery moisture lay upon the pavements, dark shadows hung like drapery along the unequal streets; Leicester threaded them with slow and thoughtful step. For once, his great intellect, his plotting friend, refused to work. What should he do?

How act? His hotel, the very street which he threaded perhaps, beset with officers, his garments elegantly conspicuous, his arms useless, and in his pockets only a little silver and one piece of gold. Never was position more desperate, never, till then, had Leicester's bosom friend refused to convince him.

Hour after hour wore on, and still he wandered through the streets. As daylight spread over the sky, kindling up the fog that still clung heavily around the city, Leicester saw two men walking near him; he questioned his face, he loitered again, down one street and up another he turned, but still those two men kept in sight, their arms interlinked, their bodies sometimes moulded in the fog, but distinct or shadowy, those strange wanderers had a power to make Leicester's heart quail within him.

All at once he started, and stood up motionless in the street. That child—those two old people! He had recognized them at once the night before—he had glided away in the darkness to avoid them. What could the child be to him but an incumbrance? Those old people in the basement were old Mr. Wilcox and his wife, poor, friendless; he strove to cast them from his mind, to forget that they lived. The after events of that night had come upon him like a thunder-clap; in defending himself or attacking others, he had found no time to think of the discovery of his daughter and her old grand parents. Now, the thought came to his brain like lightning. He would secure the little girl—Adeline's lost child; the secret of her existence was his; it should redeem him from the consequence of his great crime. The old people were poor—they would give up the child to a rich father, and ask no questions. With this last treasure in his power, Adeline would not refuse to bribe it from him at any price. Herself-constituted guardian, too, that man of rude will, and indomitable strength, he who had sacrificed a life-time to the mother of this child, who had tracked his own steps like a hound, could he, who had given up so much, refuse to surrender his vengeance, also? This humble girl, from whom he had turned so contemptuously, how precious she became as these thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain.

Leicester proceeded with a rapid step to the neighborhood that he had visited the previous night. He descended to the area, glided through the dim hall, and entered the back basement just as old Mr. Warren, or Wilcox we must now call him, was sitting down to breakfast with his wife and grand-child. A look of poverty was about the room, warded off by care and cleanliness but poverty still—Leicester had only time to remark this, when his presence was observed. Old Mr. Wilcox rose slowly from his chair, his thin face grew pale as he gazed upon the elegant person of his visitor, and the rich dress, so strongly at variance with the place. A vague terror seized him, for he did not at once recognise the features, changed by time, and more completely still, by a night of agonizing excitement. At length he recognized his visitor, and sinking to his chair, uttered a faint groan.

Julia started up, and flung her arms around the old man's neck. Leicester came quietly forward.

"Have you forgotten me, sir?" he said, laying one hand softly upon the table.

"No," gasped the old man, "no."

"And the little girl, she seems afraid of me, but when she knows—"

"Hush," said the old man, rising, with one arm around the child, "not another word till we are alone. Wife, Julia, leave the room."

The old woman hesitated. She too had recognized Leicester, and she dreaded to leave him alone with her husband. Julia looked from one to the other, amazed and trembling.

"As you wish. I have no time to spare. Send them away, and we can more readily settle my demands and your claims."

"Go!" replied the old man, laying his hand on Julia's head.

His withered hand shook like a leaf.

Julia and her grandmother went out, but not beyond the hall; there they stood, distant as the space would permit, but still within hearing of the raised voices within. Now and then a word rose high, then old Mrs. Wilcox would draw Julia's head against her side, and press a hand upon her ear, as if she feared that even those indistinct murmurs should reach her.

While these poor creatures stood trembling in the hall, a strange, fierce scene was going on over that miserable breakfast-table. Leicester had been persevering and plausible at first—with promises of wealth, and protestations of kindness, he had endeavored to induce the poor old man to render up the child. When this failed, he became irritated, and with fiercer passions attempted to intimidate the feeble being whom he had already wronged almost beyond all hopes of human forgiveness. The old man said little, for he was terrified, and weak as a child; but his refusal to yield up the little girl never left him for a moment. "If the law takes her away, I cannot help it," he said, "but nothing else ever shall." Tears rolled down the old man's face as he spoke, but his will had been expressed, and the man who came to despoil him saw that it was immovable.

Despairing at last, and fiercely desperate, Leicester rushed from the basement. Julia and her grandmother shrunk against the wall, for the palor of his face was frightful. He did not appear to see them, but went quickly through the outer door and up to the side walk. Here stood the two men, arm in arm, ready to follow him. He turned back and retraced his steps with a dull, heavy footfall, utterly unlike the elasticity of his usual tread. Further and further back crowded the frightened females. The old man was so exhausted that he could not arise from the chair to which he had fallen. He looked up when Leicester

entered the room and said, beseechingly, "oh let me alone, for how miserable you have made us, and let us alone."

"Once more, once more I ask, will you give up the child?"

"No—no."

A knife lay upon the table, long and sharp, one that Mrs. Wilcox had been using in her household work. Leicester's eye had been fixed on the knife while he was speaking. His hand was outstretched toward it before the old man could find voice to answer. Simultaneous with the brief "no," the knife flashed upward, down again, and Leicester fell dead at the old man's feet. Mr. Wilcox dropped on his knees, seized the knife, and tore it from the wound. Over his withered hands, over the white vest, down to his feet, gushed the warm blood. It paralyzed the old man; he tried to cry aloud, but had no power. A frightful stillness reigned over them a few seconds, then many persons came rushing into the room.

CHAPTER XX.

A LIGHT shone in that pretty cottage—a single light from the chamber where Julia had robed Florence Nelson in her bridal dress. A bed was there, shrouded in drapery, that hung motionless, like marble, and as coldly white—glossy linen swept over the bed, frozen as it were over the outline of a human form. Death, death, the very atmosphere was full of death. On one corner of the bed, crushing the cold linen, wrinkled with her weight, Florence Nelson had seated herself, and with her black ringlets falling over the dead, sung to him as no human being ever sung before; sometimes she laughed—sometimes wept. Every variation of her madness was full of pathos, sweet with tenderness, save when there came from the opposite room a pallid and grief-stricken creature, with drooping hands, and eyes heavy with unshed tears. If this unhappy woman attempted to approach the bed, or even enter the room, Florence would spring up with the fierce cry of a wounded eagle, the song rose to a wail, then, with her waxen hands, she would gather up the linen in waves, over the dead, and if Adeline came nearer, shriek after shriek rose through the cottage. Thus poor Adeline Leicester, driven from the death-couch of her husband, would creep back to where his mother knelt in her calm, still grief. There, with her stately head bowed down, her limbs prone upon the floor, she would murmur—"oh God, help me. It is just—but help me, help me!"

THE END.